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Nightmares are Dreams, Too

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NIGHTMARES ARE DREAMS, TOO

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
College of Music & Dramatic Arts
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

in

Costume Technology and Design

by
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B.A., Salisbury University, 2008
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ABSTRACT

This work explores themes of womanhood through the creation of an installation that is a blend of visual art and costume design.

Often the initial creative impulse of a costume design can be compromised by the needs or necessity of a production. Using this instinct as a guide to the exploration of themes of womanhood, this journey will yield the design and production of highly theatrical and emotional pieces of art. The purpose of this work is to tell stories and share experiences of being a woman. The pieces will be displayed as an environmental installation that will invite the viewer to experience costume design in a non-traditional manner.

CHAPTER 1: THE QUESTION THAT STARTED IT ALL

This work began with a lot of questions that yearned to be explored, but not necessarily answered. “What does it mean to be a woman?” is the driving question that spurred this exploration using costume design to create art that represents challenges women face in the world today. With this question in mind, I considered different ways of approaching this question and why it was important to ask now. In this thesis, I will share the process of exploration that I undertook to create an art installation using the process of costume design. I will explain my research of different types of art installations and feminist art to see how women’s stories are already represented in art and to see where the type of work that I wanted to create would fit. Then, I will describe the inspiration for each of the six pieces that I created for the installation and the build process for each piece. Finally, I will share the experience of putting up the installation and audience reactions as captured in the response survey. Let’s first look at the purpose and reasoning behind the project.

The question, “what does it mean to be a woman?” is one that is appropriate for a costume designer to explore. We must remove our own bias and understand that we are not always telling our own story, as a costume designer, but the story of a character. The clothing that we create for an actor must contain history, understanding, and core knowledge of who that character is. Understanding who the characters are in the world of the play is an important commitment that designers make to the production as a whole.

This thesis project provided me with a unique opportunity to use my own experiences as a part of creating a set of costumes, but not have to follow a predetermined script. I let questions guide my exploration, but always came back to the core of what I tried to answer. Furthermore, I had to consider: what story did I want to tell the answers to the questions?

Part of the desire to learn more about gender identity stories is my desire to be a teacher who can empathize and relate to all of my students on a deeper level. As a Costume Designer, I clothe different characters that are telling very different stories all the time. How can I support my students in telling their own stories, sharing with them that there are people in the world who want to hear their stories and understand who they are? One way that I can begin to do this is by sharing some of my own stories through this creative work. By exploring challenges that women face in the world today and sharing them through the lens of my own personal experience, I hope that others can relate to these stories.

I understood in the beginning phase of this work that I was not looking to find a definitive answer to my initial question, “what does it mean to be a woman?” Rather, the search was for further clarity about experiences that might add to the female identity. It was also an experiment in connection with an audience. The process of asking questions lead to exploration, which started a journey that was more impactful and meaningful than finding definitive answers.

CHAPTER 2: WHAT ELSE IS OUT THERE? RESEARCHING ART INSTALLATIONS AND FEMINIST ART

During the early stages of this work, I researched art installations and feminist art to see where my work might fit into existing genres of presentation. This research helped me decide if I would proceed forward in owning the stories as my own and titling them in the first person, or using less personal language. This also helped me in the planning and implementation of the public installation. The intriguing thing about the artists that made the most impact on me was their method of incredibly thoughtful and deliberate storytelling.

I found that many female performance artists included their own bodies as subjects in their art. Often they test their bodies to see how far they could go, using their own skin as a canvas on which they can make a statement. The choice to include their own nudity in their work was their willingness to claim this work as their own and to represent women by sacrificing themselves. One of these female performance artists that I find very inspiring is Marina Abramović, who is interested in using her body as “a site of artistic and spiritual exploration.” (Cunningham, “Abramović, Marina”) Although she does not consider herself a feminist, because “[... an] artist has no gender,” (Gay, “Bad Feminist”) it is very interesting to me that Abramović chooses to use her own body as her subject or canvas. In the film, “The Artist is Present,” we see Abramović in the final stages of preparation for her installation of the same name at the Museum of Modern Art. Her acknowledgement that her bodily and spiritual presence is what will make this exhibit a success is what I find to be particularly interesting.

In this particular exhibit she is fully clothed in a long dress; a different color for each month of performance. I appreciate that she is inviting the audience to join in a moment of connection, and that this connection will be different for each person who chooses to sit across from her. The incredible amount of energy that it takes to be mentally present with another person for a prolonged period of time had a profound effect on some audience members, as could be witnessed in the film. It takes a level of trust between audience member and artist to make that wordless connection, which required vulnerability from both individuals.

One of the hardest parts of creating this work for me was being vulnerable in front of an unknown audience. Knowing that I was going to share some of my deepest thoughts and struggles with absolutely anyone who chose to attend the installation made the decision of what I would share a difficult one. I knew that I had to let go of shame in order to be vulnerable in front of an audience. Some of the topics that I chose to explore in this work are some that are very personal and bring up stigmatizing feelings of shame. One of the things I appreciate about Abramović is her willingness to be completely vulnerable not just in front of her audience, but often with her audience as in her “Artist is Present” installation. In an interview with Klaus Biesenbach, Abramović speaks of the importance of shame and vulnerability:

To do things with your shame or say things that you're ashamed of or to expose yourself in a shameless way, it's like opening yourself to the audience. Being so vulnerable, this is something that really breaks down the walls between you and the audience. And I think it's really important. [...] We don't deal with shame. We are even ashamed to admit certain things to ourselves, never mind to friends or large audiences. (Stiles et. al, 25)

Although Abramović does not identify as a feminist artist, I appreciate and feel connected to her art. Her work is iconic in performance and body art, and she shares stories from her life, showing great honesty and vulnerability. In the book simply called "Marina Abramović," she shares stories with very simple titles such as "The story about the soup on the head," "The story about the divorce," and "The story of the champagne glasses." (Stiles et. All, 120-121) The succinct, straightforward simplicity of the stories are very inspiring to me because it is telling of how unashamed Abramović is of the stories. She doesn't waste time apologizing for anyone in the stories or explaining any unnecessary details. Rather it is the mundane, matter-of-fact telling of these often disturbing stories that makes them more powerful. A story that particularly stood out to me was "The story about the shoe polish":

My mother would come to my room in the middle of the night when I was asleep to make sure that the bed was in order and not messed up. Otherwise she would wake me up to straighten the bed sheets. She controlled all my telephone calls and if any male friend called me she would scream, asking, 'What do you want with my daughter?' She told me that sex is dirty and the only thing to do is immediately get pregnant and never do it again. She wished that I would marry a man who was a doctor, a lawyer or an architect. Somebody who could take care of me. One day, to protect myself from her, I collected three hundred cans of brown shoe polish and smeared their contents all over the walls, windows, and doors of my room. It looked like the room was covered with shit, and the smell was unbearable. My plan worked perfectly. She opened the door, she screamed, closed the door, and never entered again. (Stiles et. all, 120)

Although I was not ready to rise to the level of autobiographical storytelling as is in this story, I did find the way Abramović used her own personal story in her work without making her presentation sound sad or whiny. Perhaps this is also a result of the way she was brought up, but this professional view of her own work and her way of unemotional reflection was very inspiring to me throughout this process.

Artists who do consider themselves feminists also inspired me in the research phase. “The Dinner Party” is a famous piece of installation work by Judy Chicago that I found to be very inspiring for the kind of work I wanted to create. Chicago was “classically trained as a fine artist,” but found herself completely fascinated with painted porcelain in the early 1970s. (Chicago, 8) She studied china painting and explored this type of art until 1974. During this time, she realized that “The china-painting world, and the household objects the women painted, seemed to be the perfect metaphor for women’s domesticated and trivialized circumstances.”

(Chicago, 11) She found that “[it] was an excruciating experience to watch enormously gifted women squander their creative talents on teacups [and wanted] to honor the women who had presented this technique.” (Chicago, 11) She researched women’s achievements and “realized over and over again [that they] had been left out of history and the records of their lives had apparently disappeared.”

(Chicago, 11) She wanted now to symbolize the omitted by creating a traditional dinnerware set that “would express the way women had been confined, and the piece would thus reflect both women’s achievements and their oppression.”

(Chicago, 11)

It was this type of double meaning and symbolism that I found to be so intriguing. The idea of celebrating women's achievements with place settings at first I thought was minimizing the view of women, but after learning more about Chicago's process, I thought this creation was brilliant. Much like what I am trying to achieve with this work, Chicago was also thinking about "[forging] a new kind of art expressing women's experience." (Chicago, 12)

From the details that she painted on the plates, the creation of the whole place setting, to how the table would be set up, Chicago thought of every tiny detail as important. One thing I thought was particularly impressive was how she planned to label each of the pieces with the women's names: "[The] women's names would be painted on triangular tiles in gold china-paint with a luster overglaze. This would make the names appear and disappear as the viewer walked around the table – a fitting metaphor for women's history." (Chicago, 13) Not only was the physical art important to her, but she also thought of how the audience would view and experience the art. In her book, "The Dinner Party," Chicago includes some journal entries detailing her process where she feels stuck, frustrated, or excited about her work. It is comforting to see into the process of this incredibly successful work – to see that Chicago also struggled and doubted at times in the process. The continuing theme through her journal entries is her willingness to allow the work to be what it wants to be, rather than forcing it to be something else.

In addition to looking at female and feminist artists, I looked at other types of installation artists. I was introduced to one of these artists' work over this past summer by one of the designers that I worked with, Dan Daly.

He used images of this artist's work as inspiration for a set design, and I was immediately captivated. This artist is Christo, who is often described as "courageous, because he above all others –as the most experienced in the making of Christos, knows the risks, effort and difficulty of his pieces." (Vaizey, 7)

Christo creates environmental sculptures, which vary by location. He is known for collaborating with architects and engineers to wrap things from small objects to vast buildings, coastlines, and bridges. His wrapping or "packaging" is intriguing to me because it is a piece of art that cannot exist without something having existed before it. For example, if Christo decides to create a piece of art by wrapping a can of chicken noodle soup, this piece of art could not exist before or without the can of soup. The soup is integral to the process of Christo's packaging art, just as women's stories and experiences are integral to my art. There is also a sense of mystery when looking at Christo's art. If you stare at a wagon that has been wrapped and packaged by Christo, you can see the wheels and the outline of the wagon, but there is absolutely no guarantee that there is still a wagon underneath the fabric and wrapping. From there, you can say that only what can be seen is an actual truth. Anything under the wrapping is a complete mystery until it is unwrapped and revealed.

Just as with costume design, "[the] process and progress of each individual project is an integral part of the final sculpture." (Vaizey, 8) Sometimes Christo takes years to develop a piece, negotiating space and finding materials. Unless an institution has the time and budget to allow for such exploration, the theatrical design process takes place in a shorter period of time than this.

An artist like Christo whose work has been highly publicized has a platform on which he can share his inspirations, but “Christo leaves room for our imagination to join his.” (Vaizey, 15) Just as a costume designer does not usually have a platform to share every decision made throughout the design process, Christo leaves the audience to experience and connect to the work on their own.

Looking at the work of these three artists and other feminist artists, I was inspired by their different forms of expression. How they each used something that already existed – a body, a plate, a building – to create new work. A costume designer creates art that fits onto the canvas of the theatrical production as a whole, just as these artists create smaller works that fit into a larger scope. The audience and their experience is considered, and the process is an integral part of the final product. Exploring different ways of creating art and telling a story was a very valuable part of the overall creation of my work. This research took place throughout the design process, and assisted in the development of the work as a whole.

CHAPTER 3: USING THE COSTUME DESIGN PROCESS

As discussed, my work for this project, “Nightmares are Dreams Too,” is not based on any type of script. Instead, the commitment I made was to telling stories of challenges that women face today. With the first step of the design process being commitment, I did not narrow down my options immediately without exploration and research. Instead, I considered the methods of how to tell stories that might stay true to my purpose, while connecting to a wider audience.

In the development of this work, I considered interviewing a small number of women asking them to tell me their story and their idea of what it means to be a woman. Through this collaborative investigation I could design the pieces that would represent each of the women and the primary challenge they face. The diverse list of women that I wanted to talk with, developing the methodology of how to categorize these women to ensure that a substantial quantity of different views would be represented, and how to narrow down the questions to ask proved to be very difficult for the scale of project that I was creating at this moment.

I considered the possibility of creating a survey that I could post on my website, e-mail out to different organizations, and post on social media. This would provide a wider range of stories, allowing anyone to share their experiences. It would also provide access to stories from people that I never might have met otherwise. It could be completely anonymous and would hopefully provide a wider sample of types of people represented in the work. But how could I honestly and respectfully include every one of these points of view?

This type of anonymous survey also has integrity issues with what type of sampling I might receive, without the guarantee of only one response per person and the authenticity of the answers is unknown. If I post this survey on my website and on my social media, it will probably not serve to sample an audience broad enough to collect a strong and diverse sample. Furthermore, if I did receive a large number of responses, it would have exceeded the timetable available to complete this first investigation into this topic.

It was a mountain of choices and I was still standing at the bottom of the valley with decisions needing to be made. When would there be enough questioning in place and enough information gathered to begin to create? I wondered who I might offend by not being included, who would think I was being inconsiderate of women in the past who have paved the way to my even being able to do this project. Then I realized that for now – with this particular work - my voice – is enough. This desire to include many different voices, I realized, would be represented by my audience and their responses to the work. The questions that arose during this process and my curiosity will not go away when this particular exploration is complete. The understanding that my inquiry into this topic does not have to end here and I can continue this work in the future is what made moving forward possible.

One of the first things we explore in costume design is the script or story for which we are designing. With this work, I did not have a set script or story in place, rather an idea and set of questions.

So instead of reading and analyzing the script multiple times, I conducted different types of exploration in deciding which topics to explore. How the work will be conducted was also something that took some time to decide as discussed previously in this chapter.

Exploration can be conducted with poetry. I boiled down some ideas into very simple haiku, which is an exercise that can be done to clarify an idea in a concise way. This helped me to narrow down the areas for which I thought I could provide specific stories and examples, while still looking at themes that are relevant to a diverse audience. It also allowed me to find a succinct way to make a point and find the root of what I wanted to explore. The following are three examples of haiku that were especially helpful in narrowing down the questions and ideas that I wanted to continue exploring through these designs.

Body as vessel
Full of life, full of caring
What will refuel us?

Sheltering others
Concealing a broken heart
Life moving forward

What is it really?
To be a woman today?
Is it a body?

I also practiced free association writing, where writing in a stream of conscious connects thoughts and ideas quickly and freely without the pressure of writing in a formal style. This is a great exercise that can be done to brainstorm for many kinds of creative work.

Alberta Turner writes about how free association can be used not only for poetry: “ If free association can successfully initiate poems, why can it not initiate hypotheses in other fields? After all, is not ‘having an idea,’ any kind of idea, similar to detecting the pattern of a poem emerging from free associative material?” (142) “The story I am telling is...” was one of the most helpful free association prompts I used in the brainstorming process.

It was through poetry and free association writing that I started to group related ideas together to narrow down the challenges that I wanted to explore in this work. These challenges were: women can be beautifully emotional, sometimes women don’t always have a voice or might be afraid to express themselves, women are/should be the owners of their own bodies, women are sometimes supportive without asking for anything in return, we are ready to let go of old gender stereotypes, and women can have both feminine desire and strength.

After clarifying the six topics to be explored, I conducted visual research and arranged the research in collages. The purpose of this research is to provide an initial method of visual communication to further focus the story that is being told. As costume designers, we often use collage in one of the first meetings with the director to view basic design components, such as textures, colors, and shapes.

Collage is a communication method that clarifies a common language between the designer, director, and the rest of the design team. If we can look at an image together and agree that it is telling the same type of story that we want to tell, we have a common reference image. This is part of translating of an emotion into a physical representation.

Until this project, the types of collages that I usually share with directors have distinct pictures that we can discuss separately and as a part of the combined group. The six collages I created for this project were an important and propelling part of this design process (See Figures 1-6).

These very layered collages propelled me into the design of each of the pieces, making decisions about color and shape more clear. The stories I wanted to tell are all very complicated with many layers, which is why I chose to use layers and blend the images together. I thought about my experiences, other women's experiences, and other human's experiences as three layers that wanted to be represented through these collages. A particular part of the collage might stand out more for one person than another. These collages were put together to create content that is original to the author or used under the fair use doctrine of copyright law.

I was acutely aware of the impossible task of including the perspective of every woman in the world when creating this project. This awareness influenced my decisions in creating the collages, especially in the mixing and melting together of the images. In the collages there are few distinct lines between the images because I did not want the images to be distinctly separated. The exception is in the collage for the piece titled "Silenced". Because we cannot completely compartmentalize our lives, I did not want the images to be separated in any very distinct way. Rather, the images had to mingle in between, around, on top of, and behind each other. They had to coexist; this needed to be more distinctly divided, because the kind of silence that I was exploring is the kind that can be very abrupt.



Figure 1: Collage for “Beautifully Emotional”



Figure 2: Collage for “Silenced”



Figure 3: Collage for “Letting Go”



Figure 4: Collage for “Hungry Belly, Hungry Body”

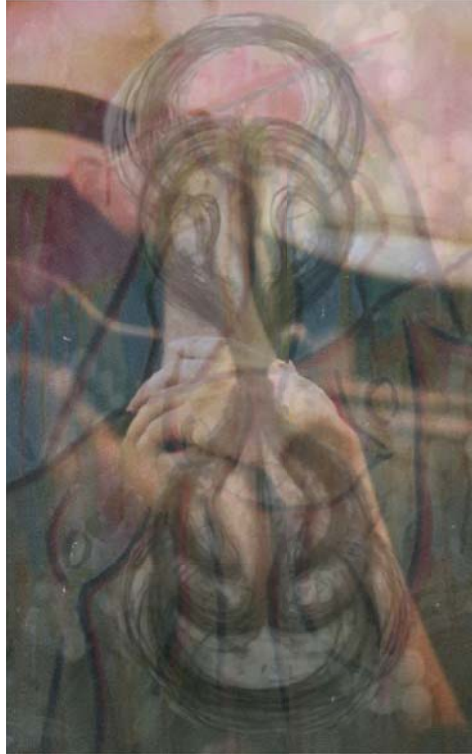


Figure 5: Collage for “Carrying”



Figure 6: Collage for “To Be a Woman”

In the collages there are few distinct lines between the images because I did not want the images to be distinctly separated. The exception is in the collage for the piece titled "Silenced". Because we cannot completely compartmentalize our lives, I did not want the images to be separated in any very distinct way. Rather, the images had to mingle in between, around, on top of, and behind each other. They had to coexist; this needed to be more distinctly divided, because the kind of silence that I was exploring is the kind that can be very abrupt. It can completely stop us from doing something, cause us to turn around and walk away immediately, it can draw a line in our memory that is very hard to erase or step over. This silence can also completely impede someone from moving forward in some way or can be a big hurdle to jump. This collage has a screen of gray covering the whole composition to show the filter that we always process our words through to try to make sure they are perceived the way in which we are trying to express them.

The collage process made colors, textures, and how to represent some ideas more clear as they came together. The creation of different layers and levels of transparency translated into the final designs. After creating the collages, I shared them to get some reactions and feedback from professors, peers, and some students. Some people responded immediately and knew the story I was trying to tell. More often, it needed a little more explanation, and then we were able to talk more about what each collage meant.

With the initial feedback, I was ready to move into the design phase. This meant making more specific decisions about how the themes and subjects would be represented in each design.

I used the collages as a guide moving forward and often referred back to them when I felt stuck. While creating these designs, I listened to the music from interesting soundtracks, including “Gone Girl”, “The Social Network”, and “The Leftovers”. I later used some of this same music during the public installation to create the same atmosphere in which I created these designs.

I conducted more visual research throughout the design phase because I wanted there to be a strong connection to nature. I looked at things such as tree fungus, bark, flowers, tree trunks, waves, and other areas of nature that have layers or repeating patterns. Research is the part of the costume design process that I always come back to when feeling stuck both in this process and in my theatrical design work.

When creating the final designs, I often got stuck on “How on Earth am I going to actually make this?” I understood that the designs could be interpreted and made in different ways, but I was starting to think that these were going to be way too complicated and way out of my budget. The fear was overwhelming, so it took some time to actually finish the designs. I had to learn to let go of some things – of the fear of not being able to accomplish this task, of the desire to also be able to create these magical things exactly how I imagined them to be, and the fear of letting down my teachers who had allowed me to do this project. After overcoming enough fear to complete the designs, I was able to finally move on to the next phase of the project.

This is not unlike how a designer can get stuck in the process when working on a theatrical production, especially if they are both designer and technician. I have experience on both ends of the design spectrum.

Sometimes I am the designer and the sole person shopping, pulling, and fabricating the show. Other times, such as throughout graduate school, I had the support of a full shop and an assistant. So knowing that I was going back to being a one-person team affected the way that I looked at the creative process. Being aware that this is the reason I was having trouble just letting go and designing was helpful, but it wasn't the kind of knowledge that I could easily nor completely depart from. Knowing that I had less time available for creating these pieces the longer it took me to design also created pressure that made it difficult to actually relax and allow myself creative space.

Another large difference in this work is that it was more like an art installation and less like costume design in the sense that I was the sole funder of this work. It was made clear to me early on in the process that the theatre department would not be willing to provide any sort of assistance or funding for this type of thesis, so knowing in advance that my resources would be very limited from the beginning was another damper on the creative process. As a graduate student who has a limited income, it was very stressful to think about fabricating large creative pieces when I know how much the things I dream about making would usually cost. Ultimately I was committed to the work and had already invested a lot of time and energy in the process, so I decided to continue moving forward and did my best to remove myself from these stressors in order to make progress.

CHAPTER 4: THE FINAL DESIGNS

Each design is filled with purposeful and meaningful decisions. The exploration, research, and visual exploration are all pathways to creating the final designs. There are some decisions that connect all of the pieces together that are supported by similar research and stories. One push towards creating the final designs included doing more visual research of plants and organic matter. Knowing that I wanted nature to be included in the designs, as I was discussing women's natures in each of the pieces. This connection to the earth is seen in each of the designs, but across the board it is seen in the lack of footwear on the models. Enhancing the idea that these six pieces are all creatures or nightmares rather than exact reflections of real people, they are more like a person sleepwalking through a nightmare.

4.1 Beautifully Emotional

"Beautifully Emotional" is the first design that I completed for this project. I knew that I wanted to incorporate a piece that talked about women and emotion. Being considered "too emotional" is something that I have struggled in coming to terms with. Especially since coming to graduate school at Louisiana State University (LSU), where the stakes are higher and more is on the line often paired with being completely exhausted, keeping ones emotions under control at all times can be a struggle.

In the past, I've seen women be written up at work or called "crazy" for standing up for themselves or becoming passionate during a discussion. I've heard strong and influential male leaders ask women "are you on your period?" if they get in to an argument. These kinds of things can certainly light the fire of fear and can force people to cover up their true selves or to question what they are doing. So this piece entitled "Beautifully Emotional," as seen in Figure 7, is a statement that being an emotional person is not a horrible transgression, but rather it is truly beautiful if we can be ourselves in the moment.

I absolutely feel as though I have to put on some sort of camouflage to blend in on a daily basis. This thing that I put on to go to school or work every day is represented in the brown jacket worn over the brightly colored and beautiful dress underneath. The jacket is textured like tree bark or a painted canvas that is starting to get old and crack with too much paint. The paint texture representing bark is starting to be exposed for what it is and is peeling away. This painted texture is darker around the collar of the jacket because around the face is where I have to put up most of my defenses. I am still working on my poker face because right now that is the place where one can look and immediately tell if I am struggling to keep it together. The sleeves of the jacket are long and cover the hands of the model. This covering of the hands is an obstacle found in most of my designs for this project. Very long sleeves sometimes leave our hands tied up, making it difficult to respond immediately. Sometimes we then have to rely on others for help – which is something that I have great difficulty doing – or sometimes we deal with the obstacle ourselves, even if it takes longer or is the harder path.



Figure 7: "Beautifully Emotional"

The colorful flowing fabric from the dress underneath the jacket breaks free in the back along the center back spine of the jacket. It splits in half and the bright fabric, the beautiful emotion, cannot be hidden. This fabric comes from the spine because it comes from a place of truth. We can try to cover up who we truly are, but often it comes out in a rush when we start to let ourselves be free. When I allow myself to be emotional in front of others, or can't stop myself from becoming emotional, then it often starts a flow that is hard to stop or navigate around. This is why the fabric is a long flowing train that drags behind the model unless they try to turn around quickly, then it gets in the way and becomes an obstacle.

The sticks and leaves in the model's hair and sticking out of the jacket sleeves are the stigma of being an emotional woman. They are the shame that comes with feeling emotional. Shame that sticks and I feel as though can be seen like a nest of twigs and leaves from a mile away. It is the crack in my voice when I become nervous or frustrated. They are the sticks and leaves that cannot be easily hidden and sometimes hurt when we try to remove them. They are the names that I have been called or hear that other women have been called – whiny, bratty, annoying, insincere. However, these emotions are natural, organic things. The sticks come from nature just as it might be in a woman's nature to be an emotional person. These sticks and bark are part of her bones; it is just a matter of accepting them and deciding what to do with them.

The title of the piece is "Beautifully Emotional," which is truly what I think genuine emotion is – beautiful. Of course, there is the level of what is considered an appropriate display of emotion. But what if that level was raised across the board?

How many people would feel slightly more accepted to be themselves in all situations? I decided that I am going to start really trying to accept this part of myself as beautiful. I can't hide it anymore as the bark is flaking off the more I am willing to move and flex the painted canvas that I've spent 30 years building to hide myself. So the dress underneath the jacket is a vibrant color of pink that shows through the peeling bark more and more. The jacket is still there, still a fixture, but is slowly starting to not be needed any longer.

4.2 Creating: Beautifully Emotional

When breaking down this design, I knew some things needed clarification: what is happening under the jacket, and how does the jacket stay open in the back? From first glance, it is a simple dress with a train and a jacket with a wide shawl collar. Even though the dress wouldn't be seen on its own, I still wanted it to be a special and beautiful dress. I decided to create a simple muslin base for the dress that I could dye and could drape directly on. The muslin dress I patterned is a v-neck basic bodice directly from the measurements of the model, Mercedes Wilson, and a skirt with a slight flare so it would be easy to walk in. The dress is sleeveless, but I did self-line the bodice with muslin for clean edges on the armhole and neck edge. For the jacket, I drafted the basic jacket block and attached a wide shawl collar.

I added fullness to the skirt of the jacket by slashing and spreading to the natural waist, leaving the bodice a slimmer fit. I drafted a sleeve to fit this jacket, but made sure it was longer than Mercedes' sleeve measurement to cover her hands.

I included an open vent in her sleeve to make sure her hands did not get scratched by the sticks that would be sewn to the inside of the sleeve cuff. After dyeing the fashion fabric for the dress, I draped and pinned the fabric in place during a fitting with the model.

The fabric that I draped over the muslin base was a mesh fabric donated from the scene shop. There was a lot of yardage, which was perfect for the large, dramatic train that I wanted to create to drag behind the dress. I dyed half of the yardage pink, as well as the muslin base for the dress. The other half I dyed orange, so the pink and orange fabric would drape across the bodice directly into the skirt. I hemmed the muslin dress so that Mercedes could walk in it without having to lift up the skirt and the train would flow behind. I left the hem of the fashion fabric unfinished on the train because I liked the unfinished look of the mesh, which had a much lighter feeling than if it had been hemmed very evenly.

The jacket is made of duck cloth, or canvas. I chose this material because it would remain stiff even after dying and washing the fabric, and knew it would take paint well. I dyed the jacket after putting it together, so before applying paint I had to press it again very well with a lot of steam. It did not matter if some wrinkles were left in the jacket, because it added to the texture that I would be painting on later. Peeling tree bark inspired the texture painted on the jacket. The lighter color is similar to the smooth young skin our bodies form to cover up a wound. The peeling texture is like the cracking of a shell that has been sitting for some time. The texture also looks somewhat like camouflage, which was a big part of the concept for this dress – having to hide one's true nature.

4.3 Carrying

This piece is meant to connect to the viewer by observing both the piece and the model's experience of wearing the costume. As seen in Figure 8, we see that there are sacks of different weights and sizes hanging from the model's shoulders. We witness which ones she is struggling to deal with because of the different weights and the location of attachment to the collar. Just as our struggles and problems weigh differently on our shoulders, so do these sacks. Some of the sacks are light and soft, but are bulky, such as the one that is carried around the arm. These are the problems and burdens that we carry for others, but ones that we enjoy even if they are cumbersome to move around. I enjoy listening to my friends when they need someone to talk to, or they need someone to help solve a problem. If I can be helpful or a support system to my friends, I will happily do this without asking or expecting anything in return. This is the purpose of the soft, light pleasant bag that can be carried. If we can take some burden away from someone that we care about and carry it as our own for some time, that might be something that we enjoy doing.

The problem comes, I've found, when we try to carry these burdens but we actually are not capable. If our own problems and burdens are too heavy to carry with others all at once, there needs to be some sort of a break. There needs to be something that helps the weight even out. Where I always seem to run into this trouble quickly is in romantic relationships. It can get very difficult to decide what to carry when it comes to people with whom there is romantic involvement.



Figure 8: "Carrying"

I want to be strong and carry all of my own problems by myself without asking for help and at the same time carry all of my partner's burdens. This is something that I truly enjoy, being a support system for others - especially my partner, but I have yet to learn how to actually balance and carry everything well. It is when we decide to carry these burdens and don't ask for or want anything in return that it is possible to become overloaded. Certainly we don't always need to ask for something in return when we are doing a favor for someone else, but we just need to make sure we are capable of continuing forward without compromising ourselves.

Coming to graduate school gave me an interesting opportunity to let go of many of the burdens I was carrying. Some things I carried with me when I moved from DC to Louisiana, but I was able to slowly let go of them. Starting graduate school completely run down, deflated, and empty from carrying too much was not the best way to start an intense program. However, I am slowly finding out who I am and what I need to fill up my soul again. Figuring out this process of what we can carry and what we need to let go can truly help to provide insight as to who we are, as I've found in this work.

It is only when we reflect on what we are currently carrying that we can start to understand how long this has been happening. We can feel a heavy burden that might be metaphorical, but feels real in our body. Once, when I was in first grade, I was on the playground and started coughing. I was bent over from coughing so hard and suddenly I coughed up a perfectly oval-shaped transparent thing.

I looked around to see if anyone noticed what had happened, saw that no one was looking at me, and wasn't too sure what to do. The whistle was blown to mark the end of recess, I quickly tossed some sand over my strange discovery and planned to come back later for inspection. I was convinced immediately that I had coughed out a physical part of my soul and needed to figure out how to remedy the situation. When afternoon recess was called, I ran over to the place where I had buried my soul and was not able to find it. I was distraught, but also incredibly embarrassed, so I didn't tell anyone. To this day, I have no idea what happened and have felt a tiny empty patch in my soul. By letting go of problems and carrying less now, I am finally able to start to patch up this strange emptiness in my soul that until now, I believed that I did not have time to deal with.

When we don't realize how much we are carrying, it is often because the full view is blocked by the stress of what is happening now. The collar of sticks blocking a part of the model's face represents how we cannot see clearly when there are too many small things blocking our view right in front of our faces. We are unable to reach through and get closer to people sometimes when some things that we carry very close to us get in the way or can easily scratch us.

The sticks are also close to the neck, very nest-like for the head – this is because sometimes the small things we take on are things that help us immediately. They represent small actions like keeping in touch with friends by looking at them on social media or texting, which can be both satisfying and distracting. These small distractions can build up leaving us unable to really see what it is that we are carrying underneath.

The collar of sticks is also so close to the face that the model should be able to rest her head against the sticks. However, it is not a comfortable rest like with a neck pillow that one might bring on the airplane. Rather, it is an uncomfortable rest – we might be able to placate ourselves for a short period of time against it, just like a burst of text messages between friends. But, it cannot replace quality time and the hard work that it takes to truly address what we are carrying.

4.4 Creating: Carrying

In the rendering, we cannot see what is behind all of the hanging sacks, so I decided to create a very simple jersey knit dress that I could dye a lighter pink that looks a little more like the skin tone of the model, Hannah Gudan. I created the bodice block and skirt block by draping them on the dress form that was closest to Hannah's measurements. The fabric I had for the dress was a very soft light gray knit that had little stretch. I decided to go directly in to the fashion fabric and leave a longer hemline, because the fabric did have enough stretch that I was confident it would fit Hannah in the first fitting. It did fit her, but did not stretch enough to go over her head, so I cut in to the back neck where later I put a zipper.

Making the hanging sacks and the stick collar were the most challenging parts of realizing this design. The sacks needed to be made out of different types of fabric that had different opacities, ability to stretch, texture, and color. Some fabric I found to be very interesting, but it would not take dye so I wasn't able to use it. I found some suitable scraps that I dyed so they would look darker and more worn.

Finding things to put in the sacks was also a challenge. At first, I thought that each of them could be filled with organic matter, such as leaves, sticks, and rocks. However, after filling up the first bag with sawdust and leaves, I moved the sack around slightly and was surrounded by a mist of sneeze-inducing powder. I decided that some leaves could be used in one of the sacks, but sawdust was not something that I wanted to use. From there, I was inspired to find other objects that would give different weights and textures in concert with the hanging sacks. I used an old leg of an old pair of pantyhose as one of the sacks. Because it was so light and so transparent, I decided to rip up some of the scrap pieces of silk from the “To Be a Woman” dress, crumple up the strips, and stuff them down the stocking. It created a mass that could easily be seen inside of the transparent stocking. This made me think of intestines or something that we might find inside of the body. I wanted this small, light, and long sack to be hanging on Hannah’s back right shoulder because it seemed like one of those problems that we might carry but not quite notice until it grows into something larger and more noticeable.

Another intestine-inspired sack was that which reached across Hannah’s side under her arm. I created it from a very soft piece of stretch lace that I found and dyed multiple times. The sack I filled with orange yarn that was left over from a scarf I knitted for a friend as a Christmas gift. It was a larger sack that got in the way of her movement because it was always hanging under her arm, but it was softer, easier to move around, and sometimes Hannah was able to rest against it.

One of the sacks was weighed down with drapery weights that I reclaimed from an old sheer curtain that the scene shop didn't want anymore. The fabric from this curtain I wanted to use for the wings in the "Letting Go" piece, but there were drapery weights all along the bottom of the curtain. The weights were still all connected in a row, but moved around like a heavy snake. The fabric holding the weights did have some stretch to it, and hung down a little lower on Hannah's front. If she were to reach for it, it would always stay out of reach unless she started from the top to pull it up and hold it. This is like a problem that we can ignore most of the time, but still weighs heavily on us. If we want some relief from it, we need to address the problem and hold on to it for a little while, occupying our hands from carrying anything else at the same time.

In order to attach the sacks, but not have them hang and pull directly on the dress, I decided to create a collar from some of the canvas fabric left over from creating the "Beautifully Emotional" jacket. I made a wide collar where I could attach all of the bags. This made things much cleaner for two reasons: the collar was much easier for the model to put on because it was separate from the dress, and having all of the weight hang from a collar piece made sure that the weight of the sacks would be felt on the model's shoulders. Just as sometimes our emotional "baggage" can be felt weighing heavily on our shoulders, I wanted to make sure this is what the model was feeling with the sacks hanging from the collar. I put the collar together in the back with a separating zipper so the collar could still fit closer to the neck.

The collar of sticks I created with twine and sticks found around LSU campus. I only used sticks that were already on the ground. The combination of short and long sticks allowed the collar to stay together very well. I bound the sections of sticks tightly together and attached them to each other so it would hang in an oval around the model's neck. The whole nest was put together on a dress form so I knew it could be lifted off of the model's head without a need for a closure of any kind. Special care was taken in the construction of this piece so there were no pointy sticks angled towards the model's face. The collar was not fit tightly around the head, so I knew it would slide around a little, influencing the model's movement. I also took care to balance out the collar during construction so it wouldn't want to slide or hang off of either side of the model's body, even though one side was built up to be taller and to stick out more.

4.5 Hungry Belly, Hungry Body

Our relationships with our bodies are all very complicated. We are influenced by our family, our surroundings, our friends, media, strangers, and countless other things. I didn't realize how much my body has been through until I start really looking from the beginning. When I look back on my 30 years of life, I don't remember a time I was ever allowed to be okay with who I naturally was. Even as a very young child, I was incredibly aware of my strong, muscular body that could swim, run, ride a bicycle, and dance to Disney movie soundtracks.

I knew that I was very different from my very slim and delicate mother, who took us to the beach every day and let us play outside in the island sun. My older brother and I look very similar; there is no doubt that we are related. We would catch fish together when the tide was low, gather small hermit crabs whose little legs you could hear swishing against the bottom of our little plastic buckets. Behind this beautiful idyllic childhood, there was always a small rumble of what was “supposed” to be, a tiny promise that I would slowly grow to be my mother’s daughter. This rumble is what began the hungry belly.

In my life, my body has been through a lot – stress, exhaustion, depression, happiness, elation, physical struggle, pain, joy. These all have physical effects on the body. Some of them manifest in ways you can see, and some of them manifest invisibly. They are the things that only you and your doctor talk about, the things that maybe you can ignore most of the time. This is why there are many layers represented in this design, as seen in Figure 9.

There is the greenish layer of skin on the snake tail and the top of the head, which represents my feeling of being an imposter. This is the unresolved “supposed” to be that began when I was very young and continues to this day. The layer of red that is exposed in areas all over the snake tail represents truth. It is ripping through the top layer of skin, just as stretch marks mark and tear the skin apart. The creature created here has long, pointy fingers which can also scratch and slash into the skin. These self-inflicted wounds are the years of negative self talk that I have perfected because they are so well practiced. They are the attempt at healing, which sometimes can just rip everything apart again.



Figure 9: "Hungry Belly, Hungry Body"

The gray fabric that crisscrosses the top of the body is semi-transparent because no matter what we do, unless we lock ourselves in a room and never come out, there is no hiding the physical body that we have. We have to cover it with something in order to go to school, to work, to the store. So this delicate, gathered fabric covers some areas that I, and many other women, feel insecure about. It bandages, wraps, and covers the upper arms, the breasts, the chin, and the mouth. The mouth is covered because body issues are incredibly difficult to talk about. It is something so personal, but so visible at the same time.

The body positive movement is well under way and I see more social media every day about teaching young girls to accept themselves. Instead of aiming for the perfect body, we are now being told to accept what we have. We just have to do with best with what we're given. I know that I can't go back in time or trade this body out for a new one. The one that I have, I need to treasure, right? This is why the model is not completely covered. Some of the most vulnerable areas are still covered, but the shape of the body is still very apparent.

The model is also very glamorous, with very dramatic and beautiful eye make-up and is in a sassy pose. This is because sometimes when I, and other women, are feeling low or insecure but you still have to get things done, we put on our game face. Make-up is not only a beauty enhancer, but it also is war paint. Or, rather, every day paint. So if I know I have something important to do or need to feel a little better, I put on some make-up. Even if it is obvious that I am trying to conceal a breakout, or I end up looking like a purple monster exploded on my eyes, it might be just enough of a boost to make getting through the day just a little easier.

The hungry belly has many different meanings. It contains a lot of questions that I started to ask at the very beginning of this project. What does it mean to be a woman? Is it her body, her reproductive organs, her insides? Is it awareness that her body is not only hers, but it is also a functional piece of nature? These questions sit with me in my insides, in my hungry belly. It is very strange to be past the age where I thought I would have already started a family, but instead wonder why this was such an unquestionable part of my future when I was a child.

This desire to have a family is something that is still very much a hunger that resides within me, it is the “ticking body clock” that is harder to ignore each year that goes by. Family can mean a lot of things – biological, extended, create-your-own – but what seems to be the connecting factor is togetherness. So I have to ask myself – what does it mean to be a woman who yearns for togetherness, but is not ready to start a family?

4.6 Creating: Hungry Belly, Hungry Body

This was one of the more challenging pieces to put together, because when I designed this piece I was thinking still that they would be displayed on dress forms. This would make the illusion of a floating snake tail more achievable. Originally I also thought the tail would be made out of some sort of hard shell that could be shaped and stuffed so the red fabric would protrude out and the cuts would look very clean and precise. I realized when creating this piece that it is much scarier, more violent, and more impulsive than the carefully rendered slashes.

The tail needed to be slashed into or ripped less carefully. Part of the need for this impulsive action is the impulsive nature of things that we say to ourselves when we are upset or feel ashamed. It is not something that we plan out, but rather it is a quick, stinging reaction.

I began by creating a long, fitted skirt out of canvas. I knew the base fabric needed to be sturdy to hold the tail and the hungry belly. Using a basic skirt block, I raised the waist higher so that it was more of a high-waisted skirt, and lengthened and narrowed the skirt so it would resemble a hobble skirt. I put a slit in the back of the skirt so the model would have more range of movement. During the first fitting, I marked where the hungry belly would go and where the tail would swirl around the skirt. The tail I wanted to look more like a half circle protruding from the body so it would look like the rest of the circle should be where the model's legs are. So I cut the skirt in a spiral up the marked line with the intention of stitching it back together with the added tail pieces included. This would mean all of the seam allowances would be on the inside of the tail, leaving a cleaner finish on the outside of the skirt.

I dyed muslin using a shibori technique that created a "scaly" pattern for the top layer of the snake. To create the red layer that would be revealed underneath, I used a solid red crepe de chine covered with a layer of red netting. For added texture to this red layer, I stitched wavy lines that crossed each other all over the red crepe de chine on a stitch length of five. This gathered some areas up and gave the fabric a ruffled, organic look so there were not just two ordinary layers of fabric.

The red layers were longer than the canvas base and the muslin top layer, so I decided to baste all of the layers together before stitching it back into the tail. With all of the layers basted together, it was much easier to stitch the tail back together, being careful to line up the side seams as much as possible so as to not lose the original shape of the skirt.

The skirt did become tighter in the process because I did not originally include any seam allowance, but it was not a problem because the skirt was not extremely tight-fitted for this exact purpose. When all the layers were stitched back together, I was able to reach in and stuff the tail. I decided to put the skirt on a dress form with legs to see how it was looking and found it completely impossible to put on the form. Too much stuffing was blocking the legs from going in the skirt, which meant that I had to move some of the stuffing around. After the stuffing was in place in the tubes on the skirt, I created the beginning and end of the tail by stitching the fabric up to a point and stuffing it before it was completely shut. I took care to make sure the tail did not cover the back zipper, as that was the only way the skirt could open for the model to step in.

The hungry belly I created by pad stitching together layers of thin batting to create a gentle mound. Two layers of thin batting placed on top of the pad stitched “pyramid” created a more natural looking curve. The shape of this belly was based on the markings creating during the first fitting, so it would go across the upper part of the model’s abdomen. It needed to resemble an open mouth of sorts, but also a pregnancy that is at about 4 months.

On top of the mound of batting, I put a layer of the same red crepe de chine and netting, then a layer of the same gray stretch that I used to create the draped top. I attached the belly itself and all of the layers directly to the canvas skirt base before covering the whole thing with the same green muslin that is the top layer of the snake. After the entire skirt was complete, I used scissors and a seam ripper to free the hungry belly and create slashes in the tail. Being careful not to rip the fabric too far, I was able to pull some of the red fabric through so it stuck out slightly beyond the final muslin base.

The top, head covering, and arm bands were all created from a four-way stretch fabric. I dyed this fabric, which was originally a light tan color, to be a light gray. I wanted an uneven look, so I did not wet the fabric before submerging it in the dye bath. Rather, I tossed it in the dye and let it sit for a few minutes so anywhere it was still scrunched up would become less saturated. After a few minutes, I started to agitate the fabric in the water to make sure that all of the fabric was reaching the dye. I scrunched it all together again using a stirring tool and let it sit for a few minutes before taking it out and putting it directly in to the washing machine for a rinse cycle with some professional textile detergent to set the color rather than letting it rinse more evenly in the washing machine. I wanted the gray to be an uneven and erratic pattern because we are imperfect, and this needed to be reflected in the fabric.

I draped the top on a dress form before fitting it on the model, Evleen Nasir-Richard. Because the top is made of a very stretchy fabric, I made some adjustments after the fitting so the top would fit closer to the body.

After Evleen moved around in the full costume during our rehearsal the day before the installation, I realized that the top would definitely need to be attached to the skirt so it did not ride up her back as she moved around the installation. Before the installation, the top and skirt were quickly whip stitched together so the stretch would stay taut even during movement.

The arm bands and face drape I created and tried on myself to make sure it would still be easy to breathe and move around. I fit them to Evleen and had her try moving around with them on so we could experiment with different ways of keeping these items in place. I put a small piece of elastic in the top and bottom of the armbands so it would fit tighter at the top and bottom. This helped the armbands to stay in place. It was clear during the installation that different types of movement would cause the arm bands to slide or gather, but that didn't end up being a problem.

I talked with Evleen about creating a glamorous make-up for the installation. This would include false eyelashes and nails. Because the eyes are the only facial feature seen, I wanted this to really reflect our society's image of a woman. The glamor we might see on a magazine cover, where we meet the woman's eyes before gazing down the rest of her body. With this look, I wanted the eyes to not match the rest of the torn apart, covered up look. Because the eyes are uncovered and make-up is being worn to bring even more attention to the eyes, I was hoping that the person looking at this costume would want to look into the eyes, even if their gaze did not begin at the face. Gervais, Holland, and Dodd conducted a study that is "one of the first to utilize an eye tracker to measure the objectifying gaze." (10)

In their article, there are detailed results of the study, which I found to be very relevant. Participants were asked to look at different photographs of women, some of whose chest and waist size were adjusted with Photoshop to reflect different ideal body types. They were looking at the effect of the different areas where people would gaze the longest and where they would tend to look first depending on what type of test they were being asked to do (personality or appearance). The personality-focused test concluded that people would gaze the longest at the face, chest, then waist. In the appearance-focused test, people focused for longer times on women's chests and waists. (Gervais et al "My Eyes Are Up Here: The Nature Of The Objectifying Gaze Toward Women")

4.7 Silenced

The purple flowing dress that is covered with the net or cage, as seen in Figure 10, embodies how I feel as though my voice is sometimes silenced. This silence happens in many different ways. Sometimes it happens when others can speak louder or faster than I, or when I am stuck in a situation where it is made clear that my voice is not valued. I often fear that speaking out as a woman will make me seem bossy and bitchy. This fear can build, leading to questioning if I am speaking in the wrong way. I fear that I will not be able to get work if I am too outspoken or too soft spoken. That I will lose friends, and that I will make a bad impression by not standing up for myself in the "right" or "feminine" way, or at all. I fear that I need to apologize for wanting to speak at all.



Figure 10: "Silenced"

These thoughts and fears are represented in the petals that are built up all over the skirt of the empire-waist dress. The petals are all different shapes and sizes to represent all of the different ideas and voices of women that have been stifled over the years for so many different reasons. Yet the one thing that unifies the petals is that they are all voices of women. The purple fabric is meant to be the unifying voice of the piece. The bodice section of the dress is meant to be very simple and without texture because our voices are silenced because of our womanhood, so the flowing textured petals stop immediately under the breasts.

This fear or “screen” between my true voice and myself is represented in the hat worn by the model, Chelsea Touchet. The swirling colors represent the different thoughts and doubts that get in the way of wanting to speak out sometimes. I can’t even count the number of times that I’ve written some sort of Facebook post trying to support a cause that I feel strongly about but then immediately deleted because I wasn’t sure if it really sounded like I meant for it to sound. This same doubt certainly was a presiding member of my thoughts in creating this entire project. The fabric of the painted silk chiffon was still easy for the model to see through so she would be able to see where she is going and we could still see some of her face, but we cannot see her clearly.

The hat resembles the shape of a lampshade, because I wanted the hat to sit further down the face covering at least the eyes and nose and sloping up the sides of the head. The hat is open in the very top, because sometimes when I get incredibly frustrated or angry I can almost feel the steam coming out of the top of my head.

This leads me to sometimes speak very quickly and in a way that I will probably regret for hours, weeks, or sometimes years. After years of holding in my thoughts until I am too angry to speak, I know that sometimes keeping everything in a very small cage can lead to this regrettable action. So the millinery wire that is the structure of the hat can also be seen through the silk chiffon, resembling a cage.

The net structure covering the top half of the model I was originally planning on making out of some sort of wire so the whole structure could expand and collapse around the body. This would limit movement and would stop the top half of the dress from moving. After looking at the purpose of this structure and wanting to use a material that would guarantee safety for the model, I decided to use round elastic that I dyed a very light gray. The struggle against the elastic net will be a more accurate visual of the struggle that I wanted to make apparent. Chelsea can at times sit very still and remain stuck in the net, she can push and fight against it using a lot of energy to tire her out, and she can reach through sections of it. It is with this movement that I hope the audience can see that it takes courage to speak our truth, and although too many women in the world are still silenced, the more our voices pile together the stronger of an impact we can make.

4.8 Creating: Silenced

The purple dress started out as a very simple empire waist dress. I used blue muslin donated from the scene shop to create the basic dress and many of the petals. The blue muslin was heavier than average plain muslin.

Because the muslin was already blue, I put it in a red dye bath to create a shade of purple. I didn't want the dye to be completely even, so after pre-washing the fabric I put it directly into the dye bath still damp and wrinkled together. After letting it sit for about five minutes, I started to agitate the fabric to distribute the dye in any areas that may have been wrinkled up. Because there was not enough blue muslin to finish creating the petals on the skirt of the dress, I dyed some natural muslin and some bleached muslin in a separate purple dye bath, creating different shades of purple.

With fabric prepared, I created a pattern for the muslin dress on which I would stitch the petals. I moved the dart intake to the center front waist and did the same on the back bodice pieces, so the darts would create a "V" on the front and back bodice. I wanted those dart seams to create a very severe and purposeful shape, keeping the same severity as the pointed cap sleeves, resembling the sharpness of a voice suppressed.

To create the petal-covered skirt, I added fullness to a basic skirt block drafted with Chelsea's measurements to create a skirt with a slight flair. I left this skirt very long because I originally thought she might stand on a large box during the installation and wanted the skirt to still reach to the floor, giving the illusion of added height. However, after deciding that the models would all be able to walk around and move during the installation, I hemmed the front of the dress so Chelsea could walk without holding the skirt up and left some of the length in the back, creating a slight train. The next step was adding the rows of petals.

After cutting a small mountain of petals, I pinned each one alternating different sizes and shapes, pleating them as I went along to create dimension. I machine stitched one row at a time starting from the hem of the skirt and moving up. When there was too much fabric to fit in the machine, I flipped the dress around to finish the top rows closer to the bodice portion. The dress ended up being quite heavy with that bulk of fabric, but Chelsea still had no problems walking around in it.

The hat was a multi-step challenge that began with silk painting on the silk chiffon. I pre-washed the silk chiffon with the professional textile detergent and made sure it completely dried in the dryer. Setting up a wide piece of fabric for silk painting in the craft room can be a little challenging, but I was able to stretch the fabric using our craft looms, safety pins, and elastic. Once everything is in place and the fabric is suspended above the table, I used a clear resist to create a swirling organic design. This technique of using a resist with silk painting is called the serti technique. After leaving the resist to dry overnight, I painted large areas with different shades of purple and a lot of water so the colors would run and blend into each other. This technique is very similar to painting wet-on-wet with watercolor. The fabric became heavier with the weight of paint and water, so my system of stretching the fabric between different things that shifted under the tension started to fail and the fabric started to rest against the table.

After painting all of the fabric quickly, I moved the stretching system around so the fabric no longer needed to sit on the table and used a paintbrush to remove any lines that formed in this process. The key to success in the next step is letting the fabric dry completely before steaming.

So I let the fabric dry for twenty-four hours before removing it from the makeshift stretching system. Afterwards, I rolled the fabric in brown craft paper and suspended it inside a plastic bin with a wire hanger to steam it for an hour. The steam loosens the resist and helps to set the paint, which is why the container meant to contain the steam needs to be completely sealed. Next, I removed the fabric from the steam container, removed the paper, and put it in the washing machine for a delicate rinse with a very small amount of professional textile detergent. The resist is removed in the washing machine so anywhere that it had been applied was still the original white of the silk chiffon, leaving a twisting and swirling pattern on the fabric.

During the painting process, I worked on creating the wire frame of the hat. I used millinery wire and metal joiners to create the wire frame, starting with three hoops. The middle hoop I cut to fit around the crown of Chelsea's head. The bottom hoop was wide enough to sit an inch away from her head all the way around the middle of the face, and the top hoop was the smallest- where all of the curves would resolve. I then cut about twelve pieces of wire of the same length to be the pieces that curved up the sides of the hat, following along the outside edge of the hoops. I used thin needle-nosed pliers to create a loop at the top and bottom of each of the side pieces, allowing the wire to be slid around in to place along the top and bottom hoops.

Using tiny dots of glue to hold the wire in place while I stitched the fabric in place, I was able to stabilize the entire structure. The middle hoop was added and stabilized by stitching the wire pieces together in an "X" pattern with tight stitching.

I used a running back hand stitch to secure the fabric along the top and bottom hoops, as well as closing up the center back seam. I trimmed the seam allowance back so there wouldn't be any extra big pieces sticking in to the hat that the audience would see.

The last piece that I created for this look was the elastic net that goes around Chelsea's torso. Originally I wanted this net to be much larger, but after starting to tie the net together, I liked the tight struggle that was being created around the torso. Depending on what kind of movement Chelsea did, she could pull the net down further, or let it scrunch up against the bottom of her arms. It restricted her arm movement and didn't allow her arms to completely outstretch or move any distance away from her body, so the sense of confinement was working with the small net. Also, because Chelsea has a small but very strong frame, the small net creating a very localized struggle looked more balanced than creating a net that would confine most of her body.

4.9 Letting Go

In a way, this piece was the most difficult to design because it really represents where I am at this exact moment in my life. I've come to a point where I have to let go of some things that I always believed would be or are a part of me. Many of these are just don't fit with where my life is going anymore or simply are not possible. Certainly it has to do with fitting in to the millennial category, which "refers to those born between the early 1980s to the early 2000s." (Lundin, "Millennial Generation")

It is no secret that those of us who are categorized as millennial are struggling to find jobs and to really find a way to start our independent lives. This group of people is also sometimes called the “boomerang generation because of statistics that show that many born during this time moved back with their parents in early adulthood due either to economic circumstances or because they are waiting longer to pursue careers and marriage.” (Lundin, “Millennial Generation”) This waiting absolutely resonates with me.

Having grown up overseas in the Republic of the Marshall Islands, it was a big culture shock moving to the United States to go to college. I thought if I worked hard I could earn my Bachelor’s Degree and begin a career. Little did I know that I would graduate in the middle of the recession, which would put my life on hold. I thought my dream of going to graduate school would never happen. Instead, I found work where I could and tried to start building a life. Many of my life choices in this crucial time were based on the person I was dating in my last year of college.

I was making decisions based on what I had always believed to be the right path to follow in life, which included love. This person was a huge part of my life for the next five years, but when the opportunity to go to graduate school to finally pursue my dreams came to fruition, our paths were no longer going the same way. Such loss lead me to realize that many of the foundation blocks of my life would now be gone. My life would need to be rebuilt and I would have to let go of that part of me, which was the only way to finally move on. The dark, dripping, shredded cloak, as seen in Figure 11, represents the letting go that needs to happen in order to truly move on.



Figure 11: "Letting Go"

I am a person who holds on to guilt and regret, which makes letting go incredibly difficult. This is why the fabric is so muddled, tangled and shredded, making it difficult to distinguish any features of the body.

The dark mound that sweeps over the model's head and from behind looks like a large pair of hunched shoulders is the heavy weight of sadness that sits over my head when I think about how my life is so different from the one I always thought I would have. The mound also restricts the models vision, which doesn't allow her to see the entire view of what is in front of her. One of my biggest fears growing up was that I would feel lost when I got older. Sometimes I feel very lost because I cannot see the whole picture of my future, but I need to let go of that feeling. I need to let go of these fears, because they can really hold me back from creating a new life that can be different and wonderful from how I always thought my life should be.

The slumping wings represent this fear of taking off and letting go of what I believed my life was supposed to be. Letting go of something that you believed would happen if you worked hard enough is very painful. These wings drag along the ground and are moth-eaten from staying in the same place for too long. They are stuck in the beginning stages of opening to take off, but instead of being useful in any way, they are more of a painful burden. The wings are the dreams that still feel like they should be a part of me, but are more painful to remove than to keep in place. The blue color of them is the glimmer of hope that is left – most of the color has faded away, but I am unable to let go of these dreams for this last shade of hope.

Carrying these unrealized dreams around adds to the feeling of being lost. One of my biggest fears growing up is that I would always feel lost. Although I do still feel lost, instead of letting the feeling stay the same, I am now trying to turn this feeling into curiosity. If I am not sure if I want to do or how to make a decision, instead of feeling lost I am trying to be curious about what options there might be. This work allowed me to take a big step into the unknown, allowing my curiosity to open up and see what will happen if I share different pieces of myself with others. The fact that the wings are stuck and unmoving is my recognition that some things cannot be forced. I cannot force parts of my life to move forward without giving myself the freedom to move around without these old wings holding me down.

The white hair and dark circles around the eyes are symbolic of the time that has gone by with this current view of my life. Reluctance to move on and let go is a completely fear-based problem of mine, which is an exhausting state in which I have often found myself. The face also does not have any other facial features other than wide, tired eyes. Being in this state of fear and immobility for too long has lead me to find it very hard to feel happy. This is reflected in this creature's inability to smile, frown, or laugh at all because they do not have a mouth with which they can express those feelings. I have often been asked "What do you want with your life?" This is a question that I am still not quite sure of the answer. Growing up I thought I knew exactly what I wanted and the steps to get there. However, I am learning to let go and to allow myself the time and space for new dreams of a different kind of life.

4.10 Creating: Letting Go

The creation of this piece posed many different challenges. The design could not be fabricated exactly how it was rendered, with dripping paint running down the figure. Instead, I planned to create this with many different fabrics ripped apart and stitched back together, or strips of fabric stitched onto something else to create something that looked ragged. I created a few examples of how this could be achieved, but didn't quite achieve what I was looking for. A dark, complex simple black fabric ended up being the solution. The hemline of the cloak and sleeves I was able to create a ragged look by shredding them unevenly.

The plain black fabric had an interesting pattern machine embroidered all over it with black threads, so it wasn't easy to see exactly the pattern or even what it was from a few feet away. Another problem that I ran into was deciding if the cloak would have any sleeves or any way that the arms could move. Because the model, Caitlin Morrison, would be carrying the wing piece on her backs and might need to be able to adjust it for comfort, I decided to include very long sleeves on the long cloak. I created the cloak from a simple jacket pattern. I lengthened the skirt portion of the cloak to be a flared skirt that would touch the floor. I did not include a collar, because it might get caught on the hunch piece that was created separately from the cloak.

The hunch and wing piece was created to be separate from the cloak for ease of movement and comfort for the model. I worked with another graduate student from the theatre department, Nathan Ynacay, to create both the hunch and wings.

We used an old backpack as the base for the entire piece. The black backpack straps would be easily concealable and the foundation of the backpack allowed the function and comfort of a regular backpack. Nathan created a wood structure that he attached to the back of the backpack where we could also connect the vara-form hunch and connectors for the wings. Before attaching the wood structure to the backpack, we cut away the outside layer of the backpack, including all of the pockets and the carrying loop. This left less bulk to sandwich between two pieces of wood to create a strong base for the wings.

We used a piece of wood from the scene shop that was already previously cut into a curve from a recent production and stapled a thick plastic layer onto the edge, creating a smoother curve rather than a square edge. We then cut fosshape into long rectangles to place on the edge of this curve, creating the curved spine of each wing by applying heat to the fosshape with a heat gun. The fosshape cooled quickly, which allowed us to cut the wing spines to three different lengths so the wings would appear to be opening instead of flat and closed. I cut and stitched six sleeves for the wings, which had a channel running at the top of each piece of fabric to fit the wing spines. The rest of the fabric hung down so I would have some room for distressing and creating a worn look for the wing. Nathan secured the fosshape wing spines to a small block of wood that could be attached to the foundation structure of the backpack. We placed the wings in a cascading position and screwed them in place. The fabric that I used for the wings was donated from the scene shop from an old sheer curtain that was no longer wanted.

I was happy to find that this fabric would take dye and put it in a light blue dye bath to provide the lightest overall color for the wings. I created an ombre effect later with floral spray paint after the wings had been attached to the backpack structure and distressed.

We then used vara-form to create the hunch that would go over Caitlin's head. Nathan cut rectangular strips of vara-form and used the heat gun to attach them to each other, sculpting them over a stool that was padded to have a curved top. After creating the basic shape with the height that we needed, Nathan screwed parts of the vara-form to the wooden foundation on the backpack and pinned other parts of it to the backpack straps. We also safety pinned two straps with plastic buckles to the backpack foundation that would add support across the ribcage below the chest, and higher up on the chest below the collarbone- similar to hiking backpack straps. With all of these pieces in place, we were able to make sure everything was in the right place during a fitting with Caitlin. After making sure the pins marked any attachments where we needed them to go, we were able to stitch the vara-form and the straps in place to fit Caitlin. To complete the hunch, I used the same fabric as used to create the cloak to cover the top of the hunch, resting against the vara-form, and used a piece of lace that I dyed using brown and green dyes to line the inside of the hunch. After stitching the lace to the inside of the hunch, I pinned the black fabric over the top of the hunch, tacked it in a few places, and slip stitched it to the lace on the front edge of the hunch. When everything was together, I saw Caitlin for one last fitting and made sure she had time to practice walking around in the wings before the show.

4.11 To Be a Woman

It is absolutely possible to be feminine, strong, and passionate at the same time. To be a powerful and delicate person is a balance that many women accomplish. Just because I stand up for myself, am responsible, and have desires does not mean that I will easily survive being thrown around and trampled on. So I ask, what does it mean to be a woman? I believe that anyone who identifies as a woman defines what it means to her, and every definition, representation, and expression of femininity is beautiful.

This piece I designed to express some of these contradictions. I was very inspired by photographs of paperbark trees in the imagination of this piece. The very delicate and thin layers of bark that peel away from this type of tree is very sculptural and beautiful, yet the trunk from which it is peeling away is very solid and strong. So just like the paperbark trees, the organic shapes on the front of the model are meant to be sculptural layers that are peeling back. They are strong pieces, supported by millinery wire, but they have a delicate silk fabric stretched across each of them.

The dress I knew needed to have a fantastical, sculptural quality to it. This perfect balance of soft and strong seems to be so unachievable, so the shapes and the flow of the dress are not realistic things that people are seen wearing every day. There is a level of formality to the dress, almost like the prom dresses of my youth because this balance is also very difficult to achieve in more formal situations.

The flow of the dress in the rendering, as seen in Figure 12, is the flow of a woman in motion. She will not stop and dwell on the impossibility of this perfect balance that we strive to achieve.

Her arms are covered in sleeves that are somewhat like wood grain, strong stable arms that can hold and comfort her children. A mother's arms need to be strong to carry her baby around for years. During the semester when this project was still in the development phase, I babysat one of my mentor's young children for a few days while she was in tech for a show. At the end of the first day of holding her five-month-old baby, I couldn't believe how tired my arms were. It made me realize in a different way how strong she is.

I could create a whole separate show about the strength and courage of this woman that I admire and respect, but this realization in particular was very important. The strength of my mentor, came from a place deep inside of herself, a natural place that she might not realize is there because it is at her very core. This foundation of strength, just like the trunk of a tree is an important idea behind this design.

I made the hat to cover the model's hair and add a sculptural element representing creativity. It takes a huge amount of creativity to find ways to balance strength and delicacy as a woman. Femininity can mean something different to everyone, but to me it speaks of an underlying beauty. Sometimes features are described as feminine because they are softer, less harsh, and often more beautiful. So I wanted to include a structure that might be considered feminine – including soft fabric, soft flowing lines, a delicate underlying structure, and not clearly defined.



Figure 12: "To Be a Woman"

4.12 Creating: To Be a Woman

The most challenging part of creating this piece was the fabrication of the sculptural pieces on the front of the dress. I knew that I wanted to make this dress out of painted silk habotai, but because it is such a delicate fabric, it needed a strong understructure. So I made a plain muslin dress with long sleeves, v-neck bodice, and a flared skirt to fit the model, Maggie McGurn. On top of the plain muslin dress, I created a mock-up of the pleated skirt and the sculptural pieces to put on the front of the dress. In the fitting, I determined the final length of the skirts and was able to finalize the shapes of the sculptures on the front of the dress. Once they were set, I unpinned all of the pieces and created patterns of them separately. I sprang many yards of millinery wire and shaped the wire to match the outside of the paper pattern. Then, I cut the pieces out of the silk habotai with a half inch of seam allowance so I could stitch a channel through which I could slide the millinery wire. The wire proved to be too challenging to just slip into a channel and achieve the shape that I was looking for, so I decided to hand stitch the wire to each of the pieces. This was a much more time consuming process, but I was able to make sure that the silk was stretching tightly across each of the shapes and the integrity of the original design of the shapes remained.

After all of the shapes had millinery wire hand stitched around the border, I layered them on top of each other similar to how they were in the fitting with the mock-up and had Maggie come in to try the dress on again. I also pleated four lengths of silk into the skirt and attached them to an interfaced waistband.

I included that in this fitting as well to give Maggie a chance to walk around in the skirt to make sure she could walk easily in the skirt. In this fitting I was able to determine exactly where each of the separate pieces should sit and attach to the muslin understructure.

The sleeves were the last thing that I added to the dress. In this previously mentioned fitting I had made very plain silk sleeves that just fit over the muslin sleeves that I was going to paint with a wood grain pattern, but it didn't make the arms stand out as much as I wanted them to. So instead, I ripped up pieces of silk that were left over from cutting the other parts of the dress and stitched these pieces back together unevenly and with large seam allowances that were to remain on the outside of the finished sleeve. I made these sleeves so long that they dragged to the ground and stitched them together on a stitch length of five so they started to gather up on their own. I further gathered the sleeves up in some areas, but the overall puckering texture was just how I hoped it would turn out. The sleeves were long and textured and looked like smaller trunks with peeling bark, but flowed and danced in the air as Maggie moved her arms around with the silk trailing behind.

I dyed the muslin understructure a red-brown before attaching any of the final silk pieces. I planned on hand painting the entire silk dress, but I didn't like how it was starting to look very uneven as the wet silk stuck to itself. So I put the whole dress without the structures into a light brown dye bath and let it hang dry. It came out exactly how I wanted it to look. With a base of color all over it, I was able to come in and add detail in some places. The sculptural pieces I did hand paint using different shades of brown and red.

I took care to paint the pieces that were farther away from the body with darker, more saturated colors. This created an ombre effect when the pieces were together. I hung these up to dry before hand stitching them to the final dress.

The same technique that I used to create the sleeves, I used to create the fabric that goes on the top of the hat. I then used the same paints from the structures on the front of the dress to paint the fabric for the hat. The base of the hat was a simple black felt hood that I stretched over a head block that matched Maggie's head measurements. I used a spray felt stiffener to stiffen the felt hood for a few days before trimming the excess off the felt hood to fit around Maggie's hairline. I cut some bias tape from muslin that I dyed using the same color as the dye bath for the silk dress. After stitching millinery wire to the edge of the felt hat, I covered this edge with the bias tape. I slip stitched the bias tape on the hat so the stitches would not be seen from the outside of the hat. Then I created the structure on the top of the hat by shaping millinery wire. After achieving the desired look for the structure, I hand stitched the fabric to the structure before tacking it to the felt hood.

CHAPTER 5: THE INSTALLATION

Planning the installation started with finding a space. This proved to be difficult as the semester went along because space is often booked from the previous year or the space might require a rental fee. I was hoping to find a space quickly so that I could consider any of the restraints on the space while creating the designs.

The original concept for this installation was going to be a multi-media exhibit, but because I was unsure of what would be possible in any sort of space, I moved forward without this being a focus of the work.

After not having any luck finding a space, my advisor James Murphy suggested that I reserve the Studio Theatre, which is our black box space in the Music & Dramatic Arts Building. We had previously discussed this being a back-up if nothing else worked, so not having found any other available or affordable options, I went ahead and reserved the space. This space was going to be ideal because the remount of our summer Shakespeare show would be happening at the same time in the Shaver Theatre right next door, so we discussed marketing this installation as something that patrons could stop by and see before the show. We also discussed having the public installation on more than one night so I would get a more diverse audience filling out the reaction survey. About two months into planning to use the Studio Theatre, I was notified that I probably wouldn't be able to use the space anymore and would need to find another place. Luckily the other plans to use the space did not come to pass, and my installation was back on.

Other than losing some time to actually work on the pieces while I redirected all of my energy to finding a new space, the installation moved forward in the same way, as the multimedia possibilities were most likely not going to be an option in a new space. I went ahead and separated myself from trying to plan to use multimedia in any space that might end up being available and decided that if there was somehow to play sound, that would be all that I really needed for this particular composition.

With the decision to not have the summer Shakespeare remount in the Shaver, I also decided to only have the public installation on one day so it would be more likely to have a stronger audience showing and it would be less of a time commitment for the models. Knowing that, I went ahead and recruited models for each of the pieces. Previously, I did not plan on having live models wear the pieces during the installation. I thought about the many different ways that this work could be presented, and ultimately having live models for the installation was the most exciting and appropriate method of presentation. Something that I always consider while designing costumes is how the pieces will move, so it only made sense that the pieces be presented both at rest and in motion on models.

I asked women who I admire and respect as artists to be the models in my installation. Not only were they wearing a piece of art that I considered to be my story, but the ideas I explore in each of the pieces are something that I know each of the models will understand on a personal level. This made them not only a model wearing something that I created, but also a collaborator in making this art come to life with me and with each other.

During each of the fittings, I explained to the models what their piece means and why I asked them to represent these ideas. I shared with them my ideas for how they could move and act, and they came up with fantastic ideas and suggestions. They each created a character that truly came alive during the installation.

I asked the models not to speak to the audience, and if they were spoken to, to try not to verbally respond. The exception was if someone was bothering them or making them very uncomfortable in some way. I told them they could say whatever they felt was appropriate in that situation. I didn't want the models to communicate with each other verbally, but rather find ways to nonverbally communicate with each other. The reasoning behind the nonverbal communication was to avoid the models having to try to remember everything I had told them about their particular design and to have to explain it over and over again to every audience member. I wanted all of the audience members to receive the same information about the pieces, which was the written statement attached to each rendering. Instead of having to worry about how to answer questions from audience members, I wanted the models to be able to focus on creating this environment together.

With the help of two other graduate students, Nathan Ynacay and Chelsea Touchet (also the model for "Silenced"), we were able to create an area of the stage that was lit well to not wash out any colors and allow audience members to see the models and renderings clearly. We also created a viewing space against the back wall of the studio on the garage door for my collages, which I labeled "Visual Research." Around the floor we had different areas where the models could sit, stand, or lay down but still remain in the light to be seen.

We used the transforming stair units and a large acting block from the acting studios to create different levels on which the models could stand or sit. I wanted to make sure the models all had a space to sit or rest if they became tired and this would allow the piece to also be seen in many different ways.

I considered the best way to encourage the audience to explore the art and not necessarily go directly to the seating bank, expecting some sort of formal presentation. Ultimately what I decided to do was lower the lighting over the seating bank significantly. Most of the space was illuminated in some manner, but the seating banks and side seating areas were left darker. At the door, I encouraged the audience members to come in and explore. If they were confused about what to do, I suggested that they start by walking around the perimeter, looking at the renderings and being able to see the models from different areas. Most of the audience members sat down for some time or stood and observed from one spot. I considered roping off the seating bank except for the first row, but I wanted all of the audience members to observe from where they felt most comfortable. As an audience member, I love to sit in the back of the house, especially in the back of a raised seating area where I can see well over other audience member's heads. So I decided to leave the whole area open to see what different audience members would do. Production photos of the event can be found in Appendix B, where some audience members are captured in the background of the photos.

CHAPTER 6: REACTIONS/SURVEY RESULTS

In order to include some evidence about who attended the installation and their reactions, I decided to create an optional survey for audience members, which can be seen in Appendix A. This allowed optional and anonymous feedback, and a place for people to share their stories if they chose to do so. I completed the IRB training in protecting human subject research participants and developed a survey with four multiple choice questions and one open-ended question. Because the installation took place on a college campus, I hypothesized that most of the attendees would be female, of college age, and would attend arts events at least twice a year. My hope was that the participants, no matter their gender identification would relate to some of the pieces.

I was unsure of exactly where I should stand during the installation, but because people were asked to fill out an anonymous survey, I decided to stand near the table greeting people in the entry way. I didn't want any audience members to feel as though they were being watched for their reactions, but I did want to make sure that I could see most of what was happening to make sure the models were ok. I was able to see most of the staged area, but still was able to encourage people to take the survey and greet them.

Something that I didn't anticipate was the number of people who would want to talk to me right after seeing the show. I predicted that people would put down their survey and say goodbye, having already shared their thoughts on the survey.

However, I found that many of the audience members wanted to stop and talk about what they had just seen, share stories, or hug me. There were a few audience members who I did not know, but felt comfortable enough to hug me as they left.

Generally, audience members understood the survey process and picked up a survey as they entered the space. I was glad that we didn't completely rope off any seating area, because many people took the time to sit and write feedback in the audience seating banks. A few audience members remarked as they left that they found it difficult to fill out the survey without a hard surface. Some audience members chose not to participate in the survey, but almost everyone filled out at least the multiple choice questions.

There were a total of 58 completed surveys, and I estimate that about 10 audience members did not participate in filling out a survey. Of the 58 audience members that filled out surveys, 37 identified as "female," 18 identified as "male," 1 identified as "gender fluid," and 1 identified as "none". The survey options: "transgender" and "other" were not selected by any participants. The majority of participants identifying as female was an expected result. Of the 58 surveyed, 21 audience members identified themselves as falling in the age range "18-24," 16 in "25-34," 11 in "35-44," 5 in "45-54," 2 in "55-64," and 2 in "65-75." The options: "18 and under" and "75 and above" were not selected. The majority of audience members falling in the college age range was an expected result.

Of the 58 surveyed, 33 audience members stated that they attended arts events “once a month or more,” 12 chose “6 times per year,” 4 chose “twice per year,” 5 chose “only on special occasions,” and three selected “this is the first art event that I have attended.” I was very happy to see that all of the options were selected in this section. My expectation was that the majority of my audience were regular attendees of arts and theatre events as I expected most of them to be undergraduate theatre majors. However, the results showing that there were two females and one male that selected this was their first art event was very exciting, and I was very happy that they had decided to attend. Of the 58 total survey participants, 47 selected “yes” to the question “Did you find this art installation to be relatable to your own life?” Only one male participant selected “no” to the same question, and 6 participants selected “I’m not sure.” Three audience members chose not to participate in this question, but did participate in the rest of the survey, including writing about the different pieces that they related to. One of the survey participants wrote in their own answer, which was “I can relate to a previous version of myself.” If we include these versions of “yes” in the total count, that would show that 51 out of 58 stated that they found the art installation to be relatable to their own lives, which is 88% of the audience that participated in the survey.

The pieces most often mentioned in the survey that people found to be relatable were “Carrying” and “Letting Go.” All of the pieces were mentioned at least once throughout the surveys, but these seemed to catch people the most.

The people who decided to stop and share stories with me at the door were mostly relating to “Carrying,” saying that they feel like they can relate to this particular piece at this moment in time. One audience member told me that a particular movement that Hannah kept repeating, where she kept reaching for a sack that she just couldn’t get was how she felt when she lost her keys earlier in the day. Many of the surveys were written as though they were observations that they were sharing with me, some of them were addressed to me by name or addressed to “the artist.” I also found the way in which the responses were written to be interesting. Some audience members wrote about each piece and how it did or didn’t relate to them, some audience members wrote in a rectangle around the edge of the page, and some engaged in an interesting word association such as “Silenced - > captured peacock.” I found that most of the audience members found the honesty and vulnerability in the written statements of the pieces to be very impactful.

I appreciate that the comments were not all just praise of my work or vulnerability, but also commented on the atmosphere of the installation and how some of the audience members did not like the way it was set up. If there were negative comments about how the installation was set up, most often it was because they wished they could look closer at the models and what they were wearing. Overall, I was thrilled that the audience so willingly participated in taking the survey and most felt comfortable enough to be honest about their feelings and whether or not they felt connected to my work.

CHAPTER 7: WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Even before the public installation, I was asked “What will you do with these things after the show?” It was a question that I did know how to answer. With my own future being uncertain, it was difficult to give a definitive answer what would happen with my first set of realized nightmares and dreams. I didn’t know if I should keep the costumes somehow, if I should throw them away, if I should give them away. Each costume was custom made to fit each of the models, but they aren’t exactly pieces that can be worn for other purposes, and I wasn’t sure if I wanted them to be worn in a different setting as each of them has such personal meaning. I was torn, because the models that love their costume I want them to be able to keep something, but I wasn’t sure if I would be able to part with them when the time comes. Just like the incredible hurt when seeing someone after having your heart broken, I wasn’t sure if seeing my work in a different capacity would be difficult. Luckily, I didn’t have to decide immediately what would happen with any of the pieces. The models were all very understanding and I knew I would be able to store them for a short period of time at school while deciding what would happen next.

Immediately after the show, I had some time to reflect upon the past few months of work. I didn’t know that this work would change the way that I viewed my process and the way that I design costumes, but I believe that it has. The clarity with which I can tell a story can inform the way an audience will understand a character.

Although the models in my installation were not portraying a character, the inspiration and stories behind their clothing and movement supported the visual story that was told. This process reinforced my own understanding of my strengths and weaknesses as a designer and an artist. By keeping a journal and writing notes during meetings I was able to take a few steps back if I became stuck and find different ways to move forward. One of the most important things that I learned is that I can do the type of work that an audience can connect with. Every time someone asked me “What do you want out of this work?” The core of my answer was that I wanted to share something that made people feel less alone. The comments I received on the surveys, what people said as they left the installation, and the vulnerability I believe all support that I was able to achieve my goal with some audience members.

On March 31 of this year, I will have the opportunity once more to share my work with an audience. The installation will travel to the LSU Museum of Art and will be remounted for one night only. I am excited to share this work with a new audience in a different setting and among other works of modern art. The opportunity to share this work again also brings the possibility of sharing the work in a different way.

Taking in to account audience feedback, the installation will be much less separate from the audience, with models and viewers walking in the same area and having areas to sit together. There will not be different levels for the models to stand upon, so they will always remain on the same plane as the audience.

I hope this will provide a more intimate experience for the audience where they can be so close to the models that they can see every little detail of the costume. It is possible that an even more diverse audience will attend, as the museum is marketing the event. The entire museum will be open to the audience in the evening, so my work will be displayed as a part of the museum as a whole, rather than a completely separate event. It will be an interesting opportunity to display my work as art in a museum, rather than art in a black box theatre. I am curious to see how the audience will interact with the models and if the level of vulnerability will be different. Because in the museum my work will be with other artists who might be displaying very personal or visceral work, I wonder what the room will feel like.

If anyone feels a little less alone at the end of the day or starts to question why they view women in a certain way, I will feel as though I accomplished what I set out to do with this particular work. With regards to future work – my curiosity is alive and well, so I hope that I can find ways to continue this type of work. Adding in other perspectives to this work, exploring what gender roles mean and how they are changing in the world today, and encouraging young artists to develop their own artistic voice are all goals for the future.

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APPENDIX A

AUDIENCE RESPONSE SURVEY

Thank you for participating in this anonymous survey!

The purpose of this survey is to gather information about the people who saw this art installation and gauge reactions. This information will be compiled and included in Camilla Morrison's thesis paper, which will be published in LSU's Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Library in the summer of 2016.

I identify as: (please choose any that apply to you)

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Transgender
- ☐ Gender fluid
- ☐ None
- ☐ Other _____

My age range is: (please choose one)

- ☐ Under 18
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ 65-75
- ☐ 75 years or above

How often do you attend art, music, or theatrical shows or events? (please choose one)

- ☐ once a month or more
- ☐ 6 times per year
- ☐ twice per year
- ☐ only on special occasions, such as a fundraiser or holiday
- ☐ this is the first art event that I have attended

Did you find this art installation to be relatable to your own life? (please choose one)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I'm not sure

(optional)

Why or why not did you find the art installation to be relatable? Were there any particular pieces that you found to be impactful?

APPENDIX B
PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHY BY CAMILLA MORRISON,
BRANDON R. MCWILLIAMS, AND ANDREW HELLER



Pictured from left to right: Maggie McGurn, Hannah Gudan, Mercedes Wilson, Caitlin Morrison, Chelsea Touchet, and Evleen Nasir-Richard



Mercedes Wilson and Chelsea Touchet



Mercedes Wilson wearing "Beautifully Emotional"



Hannah Gudan wearing "Carrying"



Chelsea Touchet, Mercedes Wilson, Evleen Nasir-Richard



Hannah Gudan wearing "Carrying"



Hannah Gudan wearing "Carrying"



Chelsea Touchet wearing "Silenced"



Chelsea Touchet wearing "Silenced"



Caitlin Morrison wearing "Letting Go"



Caitlin Morrison wearing "Letting Go"



Caitlin Morrison wearing "Letting Go"



Evleen Nasir-Richard wearing "Hungry Belly, Hungry Body"



Evleen Nasir-Richard wearing "Hungry Belly, Hungry Body"



Evleen Nasir-Richard wearing "Hungry Belly, Hungry Body"



Maggie McGurn wearing "To Be a Woman"



Left to right Chelsea Touchet and Maggie McGurn



Maggie McGurn wearing "To Be a Woman"



Models pictured with the artist, Camilla Morrison, in the center after the public installation on January 22, 2015

VITA

Camilla is a Costume Designer and Arts Educator. She is working to graduate from Louisiana State University with her MFA in Costume Technology and Design in the Spring of 2016. In her last semester of graduate school, she will also design the Swine Palace production, *Vieux Carre*. In the summer of 2015, she was the Costume Design Fellow at the Hangar Theatre in Ithaca, NY, where she designed *Trojan Women*, *Mud*, *Infernal Machine*, *The Crazy Locomotive*, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, *Stuart Little*, *Red Riding Hood*, and *Charlotte's Web* while assisting on two Main Stage productions. Before going to the Hangar, Camilla designed *Carrie, the Musical* and *Stick Fly* at LSU in Baton Rouge. Previously, Camilla worked in the Washington D.C. area as a freelance Costume Designer, Stage Manager, Teaching Artist, or Arts Administrator for companies such as Adventure Theatre MTC, Landless Theatre Company, Rorschach Theatre, Flying V, Dominion Stage, Silver Spring Stage, and the Hope Operas. While earning her BA in Theatre from Salisbury University in Maryland, Camilla was awarded the Joanne Grant Scholarship for Excellence in Theatre. In 2010, Camilla followed in the footsteps of Steven Sondheim and Mary Rodgers Guettel by completing a residential internship at the Westport Country Playhouse in Westport, CT. In the future, Camilla hopes to teach at the university level. She hopes to help young theatre artists find their voice and to teach them to be confident collaborators. Camilla desires to keep creating art in the years to come and continue expanding her scope of work.