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## A storied surface

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# A STORIED SURFACE

A Thesis

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

in

The School of Art

by  
Courtney Wilburn Marse  
B.A., Louisiana State University, 2008  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	ii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	iv
ABSTRACT .....	vi
CHAPTER	
INTRODUCTION .....	1
BACKGROUND .....	2
PROCESS .....	5
RESEARCH .....	17
RESULTS .....	21
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	39
VITA.....	41



## LIST OF FIGURES

1.	<i>Matilda Series</i> digital pint, 24x24 A. <i>Matilda</i> , B. <i>Miss Honey</i> , C. <i>The Trunchbull</i>	.6
2.	Abstractions A. <i>Matilda</i> , B. <i>Miss Honey</i> , C. <i>The Trunchbull</i>	7
3.	Abstracted Illustrations A. <i>Matilda</i> , B. <i>Miss Honey</i> , C. <i>The Trunchbull</i>	7
4.	Prints A. <i>Matilda</i> , B. <i>Miss Honey</i> , C. <i>The Trunchbull</i>	8
5.	<i>Matilda</i> Bodice A. Front, B. Back	8
6.	<i>Miss Honey</i> Bodice A. Front, B. Back	9
7.	<i>The Trunchbull</i> Bodice A. Front, B. Back	9
8.	<i>White Light</i> entry into 2013 <i>Uncommon Thread "Carte Blanche" Wearable Art Show</i>	10
9.	<i>White Light</i> entry into 2013 <i>Uncommon Thread "Carte Blanche" Wearable Art Show</i> Press	11
10.	Apparel designs featuring digital textile printing A. Alexander McQueen Spring 2009, B. Alexander McQueen Spring 2009, C. Mary Katrantzou's MA collection, D. Mary Katrantzou, E. Mary Katrantzou Resort 2014, F. Clover Canyon Fall 2013	20
11.	Hand created pattern-making scanned and matched to make digital patterns	25
12.	Hand created pattern-making scanned and matched to make digital patterns	25
13.	Digital patterns created for <i>Provence</i>	26
14.	Digital patterns created for <i>Côte d'Azur</i>	27
15.	Digital patterns created for <i>Toscana</i>	27
16.	Illustrations A. <i>Provence</i> , B. <i>Côte d'Azur</i> , C. <i>Toscana</i>	28
17.	Abstractions A. <i>Provence</i> , B. <i>Côte d'Azur</i> , C. <i>Toscana</i>	30
18.	Abstracted Illustrations A. <i>Provence</i> , B. <i>Côte d'Azur</i> , C. <i>Toscana</i>	30
19.	Prints A. <i>Provence</i> , B. <i>Côte d'Azur</i> , C. <i>Toscana</i>	31

20.	Garment A. <i>Provence</i> engineered print on <i>Toscana</i> pattern-making, B. <i>Provence</i> engineered print on <i>Provence</i> pattern-making, C. <i>Provence</i> engineered print on <i>Côte d'Azur</i> pattern-making .....	31
21.	Garment A. <i>Côte d'Azur</i> engineered print on <i>Provence</i> pattern-making, B. <i>Côte d'Azur</i> engineered print on <i>Côte d'Azur</i> pattern-making, C. <i>Côte d'Azur</i> engineered print on <i>Toscana</i> pattern-making .....	32
22.	Garment A. <i>Toscana</i> engineered print on <i>Côte d'Azur</i> pattern-making, B. <i>Toscana</i> engineered print on <i>Toscana</i> pattern-making, C. <i>Toscana</i> engineered print on <i>Provence</i> pattern-making.....	32
23.	Exhibition Space: Entry .....	34
24.	Exhibition Space: Back Wall .....	35
25.	Signage: <i>Provence</i> .....	36
26.	Signage: <i>Côte d'Azur</i> .....	36
27.	Signage: <i>Toscana</i> .....	37

## ABSTRACT

*A Storied Surface* is an exploration of narrative based graphic design engineered for textile surfaces. Beginning with an experiment involving the characters of the novel *Matilda*, I developed a design system. My process involves creating narratives and illustrating the characters. Then the illustration is abstracted. The abstraction is used to create prints. Finally, all of the elements including the original illustration, abstraction, and print are used to create engineered designs for three-dimensional surfaces.

Advances in digital textile printing and the increasing implementation of graphic textiles in the fashion industry led me to experiment with applying my own design to textiles surfaces. Through the creation of my own narratives, I refined my design system and reached a solution for three-dimensional application involving digital textile printing. The conclusion resulted in the creation of engineered prints applied to textile surfaces, which express my own narratives about the people and places of *Provence, Côte d'Azur, and Toscana*.

## INTRODUCTION

People often say, “If these walls could talk,” but why do we assume a surface cannot tell a story? With graphic design, I aim to tell narratives through illustration and prints applied to surfaces. The experimentation process started with assessing my unique abilities. In doing so, I developed a system for infusing illustration and construction in my process. The experimentation process led me to research the application of design on different three-dimensional surfaces. In particular, I extensively researched digital textile printing, its capabilities, and designers who are using the technology similarly. Due to the findings of my design and academic research, I found a niche in graphic design and an area for development.

## BACKGROUND

Now more than ever, fabric and the garment are a graphic designer's medium. Sharon Helmer Poggenpohl wrote *Graphic Design: The Career Guide and Education Directory* and defines Graphic Design in an article for The American Institute of Graphic Arts as "a creative process that combines art and technology to communicate ideas."<sup>1</sup> The development of digital printing on fabric and the rise of large-format printers specifically created for textile printing has opened up a new realm of exploration within graphic design.

New digital textile printing technology combined with graphic design skills creates a niche in design: engineered prints. Because each part of the design can be printed on fabric using the same mentality as product design, the design can "flow unbroken" around the form, which creates a "degree of continuity."<sup>2</sup> The advancement in technology and pre-press eliminates the need for creating repeat patterns.

"The digital printing of textiles grew out of reprographic technologies originally developed for paper- and signage printing, and it now offers the same advantages to the textile industry that digital production affords the paper- and banner printing businesses."<sup>3</sup>

Unlike screen-printing, which dominated printing in the apparel industry, digital textile printing allows for faster production and "the ability to print intricate details and

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<sup>1</sup> Sharon , Helmer Poggenpohl. The American Institute of Graphic Arts, "AIGA.org." <http://www.aiga.org/interior.aspx?pageid=3079&id=2056>.

<sup>2</sup> Melanie Bowles, and Ceri Issac, *Digital Textile Design*, (London: Lauren King Publishing, 2009), 12.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 19

millions of colors.”<sup>4</sup> Apparel, furniture, and additional fabric-based products become a graphic designer’s form. Taken a step further, engineered prints can be applied to a multitude of three-dimensional surfaces and materials such as wallpaper and murals.

The lines are blurring between surface designer, textile designer, and graphic designer. What differentiates the medium for graphic design? Graphic designers have the opportunity to use this medium as a communication tool and infuse visual ideas and narratives into engineered prints.

With knowledge of apparel pattern-making, the graphic designer can reinforce a message by connecting the sculptural quality of a garment to a specific narrative. The same method can be applied to other three-dimensional forms. The combination of engineered prints and construction creates a new arena for visual communication on three-dimensional surfaces. Fashion design brands such as Mary Katrantzou, Clover Canyon, and Alexander McQueen have been at the forefront of experimentation with digital textile printing and its use of engineered prints in apparel design. Their visual communication skills distinguish them from many others in the industry. Katrantzou wrote, "Digital print allows me to experiment with print in a way that fine art and other methods could not. I use my mouse as my paintbrush and it opens up a huge spectrum for possibility.”<sup>5</sup>

My primary goals for experimentation are: 1. to fuse hand illustration and digital design and 2. to free design from the two-dimensional surface. I found a design solution

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<sup>4</sup> Melanie Bowles, and Ceri Issac, *Digital Textile Design*, (London: Lauren King Publishing, 2009), 12.

<sup>5</sup> Tamasin Doe. *The Print Revolution: Groundbreaking Digital Design in the Digital Age*, (Berkeley, CA, USA: Gingko Press, 2013), 6.

by examining both my unique skills outside of graphic design and the reasons I am drawn to particular subjects for illustration.

## PROCESS

George Nelson, one of the founders of American Modernism, set up the thesis exploration eloquently when he said:

The aim of the design process is always to produce an object that *does something*. In problem solving, the limitations are far more important than the freedoms... The only creative freedom that is worth anything is found in setting up a problem so that it can be solved intelligently.<sup>6</sup>

My design problem is a two-part question: 1. “How can I combine illustration and graphic design?” and 2. “How can I release it from the two-dimensional square space of the computer?”

My solution is to create engineered prints applied to surfaces. I aim to visually communicate narratives through prints and surfaces. The end product does not exist purely for aesthetics – rather, it visually communicates a narrative about the people and places that inspire me.

I arrived at my design solution through experimentation with the characters of the novel *Matilda* written by Roald Dahl, which allowed me to explore multiple design solutions and discover a creative and exciting result for further investigation. I began by visually interpreting the characters and their relationships as I saw them through a series of character illustrations. Each character is represented by a hand-drawn illustration. Details from the story, such as adjectives or nouns that reinforce the character’s personality were digitally illustrated and used as larger textural patterns over the illustration in order to add dimension visually and conceptually. As seen in Figure 1 A, Matilda’s detail is the wormwood plant, which refers to her family’s last name,

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Webb, *George Nelson*, (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2003), 23.



Wormwood. As seen in Figure 1 B, Miss Honey's details are chains, which refers to the power her aunt Agatha Trunchbull had over her. As seen in Figure 1 C, The Trunchbull's details are vines, which refers to the vines of Miss Honey's English garden home in which she lived. The creeping of the vines represents how Miss Honey will ultimately prevail.

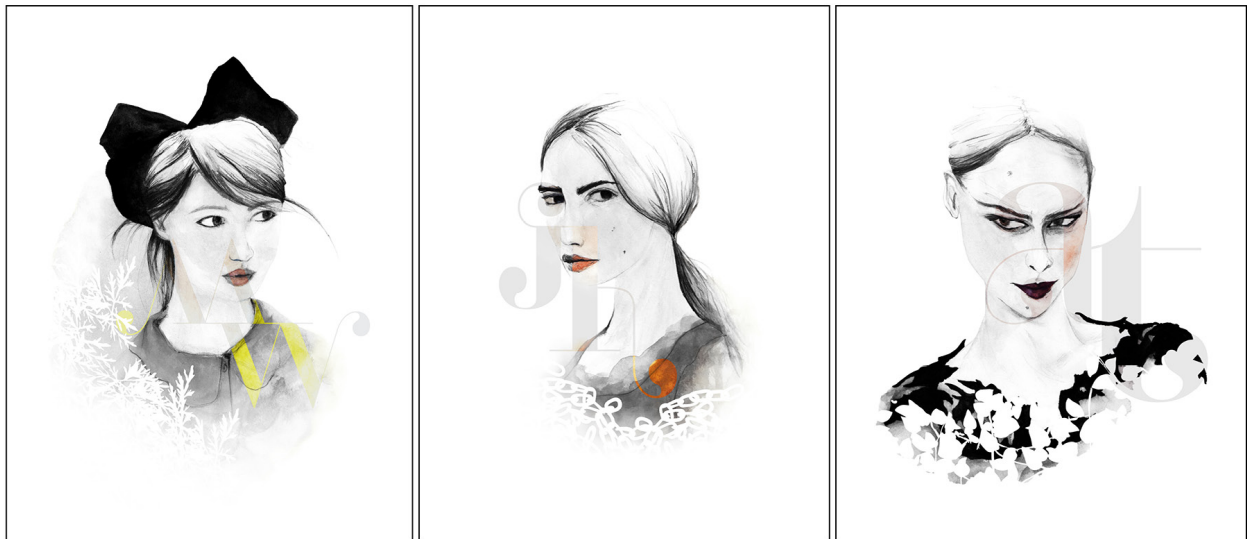


Figure 1 *Matilda Series* digital pint, 24x24 A. *Matilda*, B. *Miss Honey*, C. *The Trunchbull*

Next, I wanted to create a pattern portraying the essence of each character. To do so, I began by choosing an adjective, which described the character's personality and an object relating to the character. With the adjective and the shape of the object in mind, I cut the illustration into an abstract shape hoping to maintain the spirit of both.

The abstracted shapes can be seen in Figure 2 A, B, and C. As seen in Figure 2 A, Matilda's abstraction is comprised of many jagged bows. I chose the bow shape, because her hair ribbon is a distinct part of her character description. The bow represents the source of her psychokinetic powers and jagged and distorted. The style of the bow was chosen to represent Matilda's struggle to find the balance between

using her powers mischievously, revengefully, and kindheartedly. As see in Figure 2 B, Miss Honey’s abstraction is skewered and distorted woven chains, which once again highlights the hold The Trunchbull has on her. As seen in Figure 2 C, The Trunchbull’s abstraction is a villainous representation of “the chokey.” As headmaster of the school for which Matilda attends and Miss Honey teaches, The Trunchbull uses a closet-sized dagger-filled contraption called “the chokey” to unnecessarily punish children. The abstractions were used to cut the illustrations as seen in Figure 3 A, B, and C.



Figure 2 Abstractions A. *Matilda*, B. *Miss Honey*, C. *The Trunchbull*

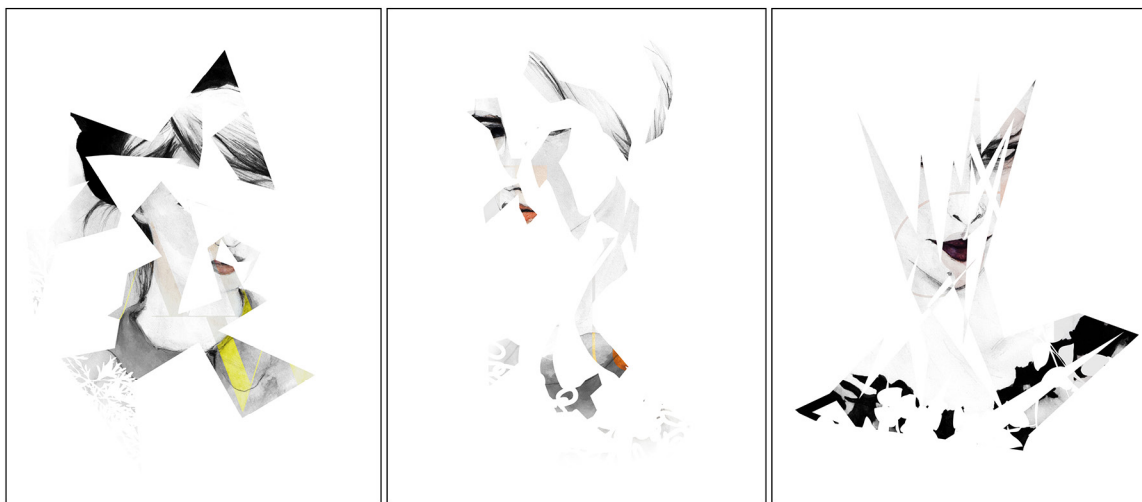


Figure 3 Abstracted Illustrations A. *Matilda*, B. *Miss Honey*, C. *The Trunchbull*

The abstracted shapes were mirrored and reflected to create kaleidoscopic patterns in the spirit of each character as seen in Figure 4 A, B, and C. Lastly, both the figurative illustrations and patterns were applied to three-dimensional forms, which can be seen in Figures 5, 6 and 7.

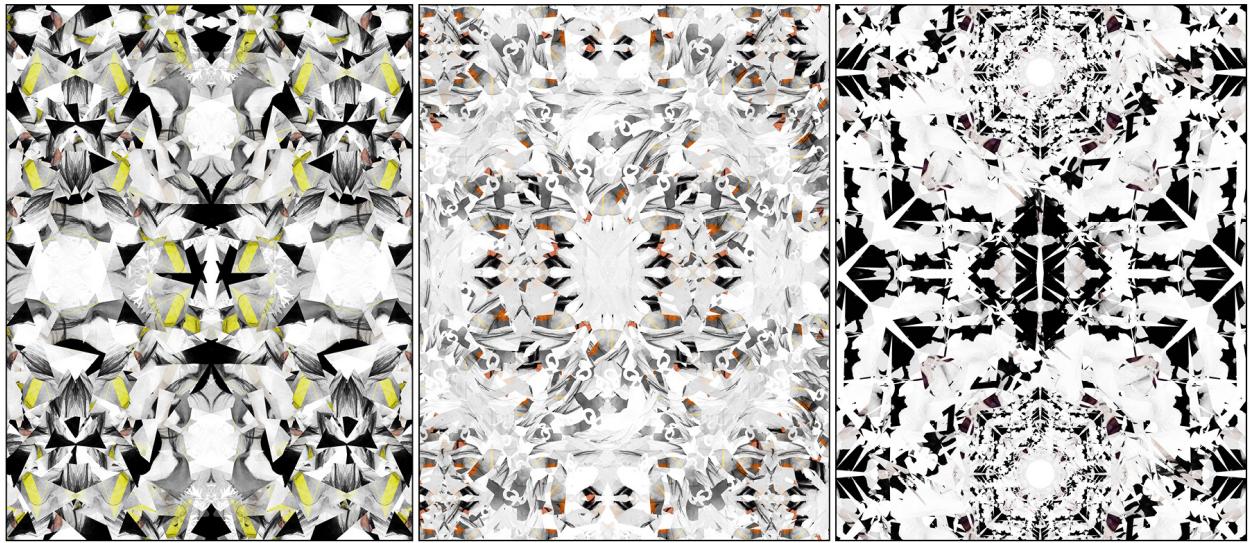


Figure 4 Prints A. *Matilda*, B. *Miss Honey*, C. *The Trunchbull*

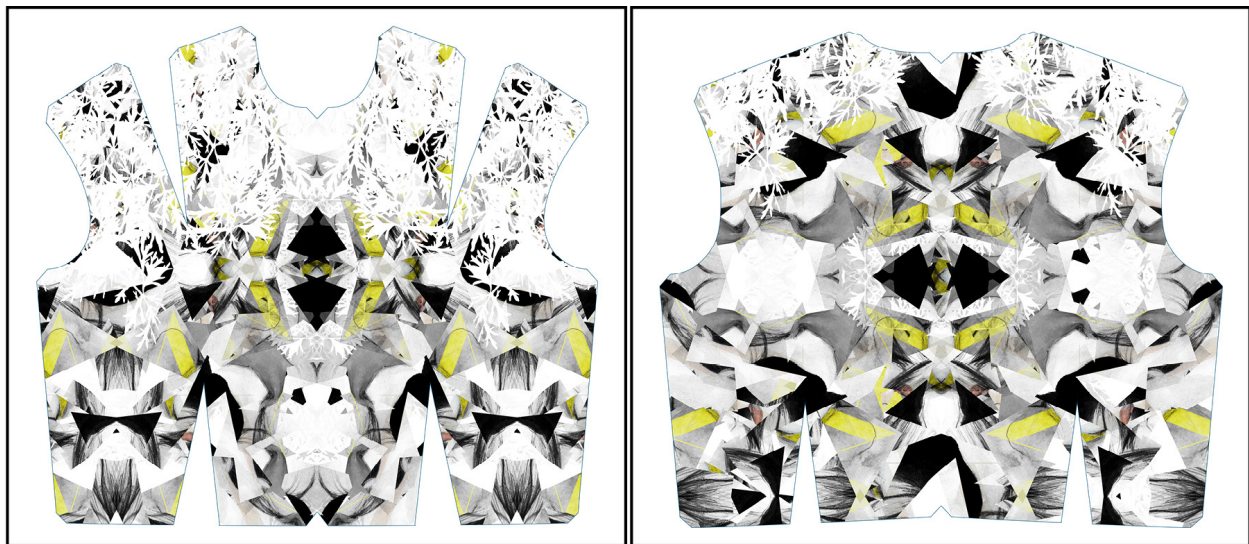


Figure 5 *Matilda* Bodice A. Front, B. Back



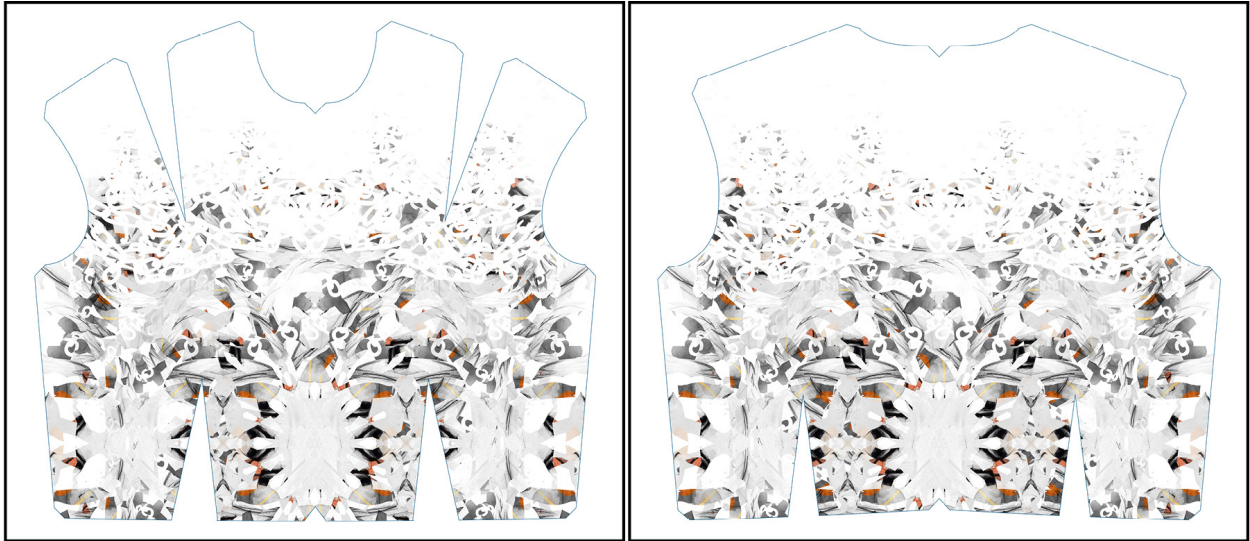


Figure 6 *Miss Honey* Bodice A. Front, B. Back

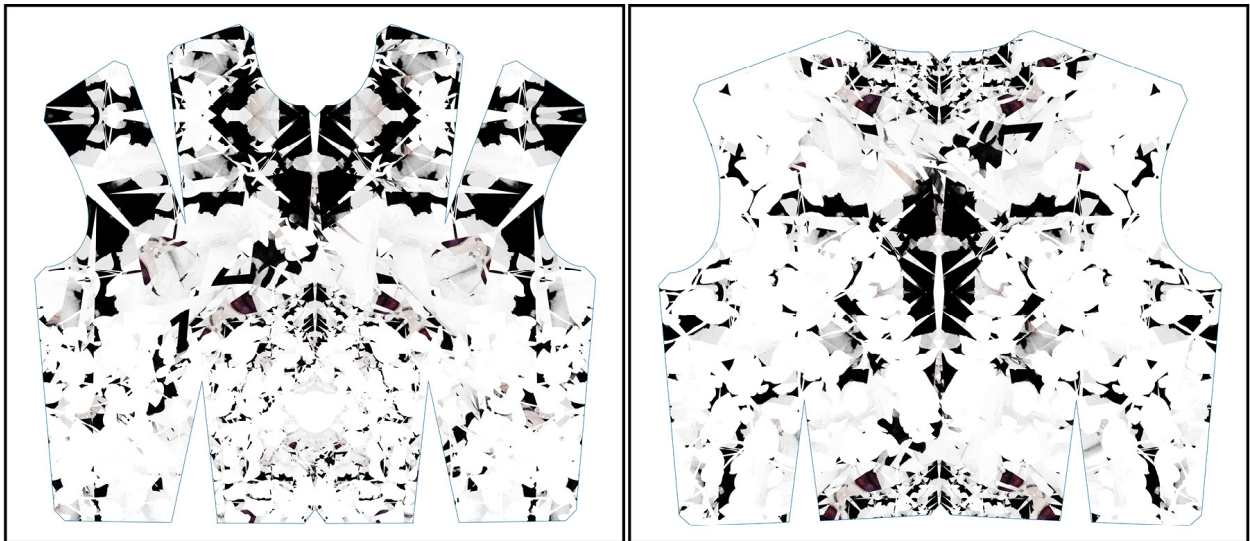


Figure 7 *The Trunchbull* Bodice A. Front, B. Back

The *Matilda* experiments led me to explore several questions:

**“Is it important for the viewer to understand the engineered print is derived from the illustration?”**

My committee members posed this question in response to the *Matilda* series of illustrations, abstractions, prints, and applications to form. At the time, I did not feel it was crucial, because the story drove the design decisions in each part of the process.

Each part (illustration, abstraction, print, and engineered print) portrayed the essence of the character; therefore, each design should speak for itself.

Upon entering one of the engineered prints on a paper garment in the 2013 *Uncommon Thread "Carte Blanche" Wearable Art* show, my answer changed. When observers and other participants asked about the design as seen in Figures 8 and 9, I repeatedly found myself explaining my design process reiterating that the print derived from an illustration. Although, each part of the process speaks for itself, I find it important for the viewer to realize the print is not just an aesthetically interesting design. I want the print to be seen on its own, but I also want the viewer to understand the complex process and backstory behind the print. I realized that I was determining what the essence of each character was. Because it is my opinion, the viewer may not have the same interpretation. I realized the viewer needed some part of the story in relation to the garment.



Figure 8 *White Light* entry into 2013 *Uncommon Thread "Carte Blanche" Wearable Art Show*



Figure 9 *White Light* entry into 2013 *Uncommon Thread "Carte Blanche" Wearable Art Show* Press

After reaching this conclusion, I began experimenting by layering the illustration, abstraction, and print in the final three-dimensional application. The ultimate goal is to present a series of three-dimensional structures, whether apparel or environmental design (i.e. furniture and installation.) As a series, the designs should tell the full story of the people or places that inspired them. Individually, they stand on their own as parts of the story and carry the essence or feeling of the characters.

### **“Is digital printing the only method I should use for producing textiles?”**

I initially chose digital printing for two reasons. First, my design experience prior to graduate school provided me with a wealth of knowledge about digital prepress and production. Digital printing and set up is a familiar and easy medium for producing design. Second, advances in technology allow me to apply the same knowledge base of printing to something other than paper: fabric. The transition from printing on paper to printing on textiles is relatively simple and provides an opportunity to experiment with a

more durable and malleable material, which opens up new sculptural possibilities. Though digital textile printing has plenty of strengths, I was curious to know the results other printing techniques would achieve. I decided to experiment with screen-printing the *Matilda* designs on paper and fabric for two reasons. The mirrored, reflected, and kaleidoscopic techniques used to digitally create the *Matilda* prints are inspired by screen-printing techniques. I was curious to know if screen-printing with the prints would further inspire the digital design process. Second, screen-printing was the textile industry printing standard prior to digital printing. I was curious to experiment with pulling apart the *Matilda* Photoshop file layers into multiple screens and physically printing them in multiple variations to discover new compositions. The results reinforced my decision to pursue digital textile printing. Through screen-printing layers from one *Matilda* character's digital design over another character's, I created compositions I had not considered when designing digitally. Though aesthetically interesting, it disrupted the original narrative and confused the story. The biggest disadvantage of screen-printing was the inability to achieve the vibrancy and number of colors that digital printing can achieve in one four-color run. Due to cost, color ability, time, and knowledge of production, I have chosen to pursue digital textile printing.

### **“Why do I gravitate to three-dimensional forms?”**

Because I am a tactile designer, I have found it is not solely what I create in the computer that fulfills my design interest. What I bring to and take away from the computer is as essential as what I create on the computer. I begin with hand-illustrated work, then design digitally, and end the process by creating three-dimensional forms, such as books, garments, projection screens, and light fixtures. The post-production

construction frees my designs from the two-dimensional square of the Adobe programs. The construction and engineering allows me to use my hands once again and continues the communication process. Considering how design will extend into and wrap around a space challenges my mind in a way that two-dimensional design does not. The sculptural quality allows me to think about how placement of the design can exaggerate, minimize, and warp the form and what choosing those techniques will communicate. Even the choice of material and shape of the form are chosen to reinforce the narratives I tell. The dynamism challenges my mind by adding another element to the communication process. The three-dimensionality of the form provides a final space for my designs to exist and a stopping point in my design process for which I feel it is complete.

**“How do I choose the three dimensional forms?”**

I choose the type of three-dimensional form my designs will become based on the narrative. Like my prints, the structure does not exist purely for aesthetic purposes; rather, it relates to or reinforces the message.

My research has led me to experiment with many different materials and surfaces. Papers and folding techniques have resulted in artist's books, garments, and light fixtures. Textiles have resulted in concept development for furniture and garments. Motion graphics resulted in video projection and research of rear projection. Each was considered for final design, but, due to the rise and accessibility of digital textile printing, I chose to pursue textiles as my material. I narrowed down my choices of form based on the prepared textiles available for printing and my chosen narratives.



### **“Why do I design for the female figure?”**

First, my knowledge of garment construction and apparel design resides in women's wear. I am not opposed to branching out into men's wear or even clothing for children and other specialties. However, my focus is to manipulate the forms I know at this point in time. I am conscious to familiarize myself with the knowledge necessary to design for the structure in mind, but I do not want to get wrapped up in the logistics of construction. While I'm interested in the construction of the three-dimensional form and how it relates to the original story that inspired the design process, I want to focus on mastering my process rather than forms so unfamiliar that they distract from the design process. Secondly, the designs are inspired by my point of view. Each part of the design process is what I see and want to create; therefore, many of the end products tend to be for women since I am a female. Lastly, most of my garment silhouettes though sketched for the female like a dress or skirt and shorts for example, are not over sexualized and tend to be more androgynous. Keeping the silhouettes clean and uncomplicated creates an ideal canvas for allowing the designs to manipulate the eye with trompe l'oeil effects. Additionally, I do not think the other surfaces to which I apply my designs are strictly for women. Since my designs originate from my female point of view, they may resonate more with women, but the structure itself tends to be androgynous as well.

### **What is my form of narrative?**

Narratives are commonly thought of in a traditional sense, meaning that they include a distinct beginning, middle, and end. My narrative takes less traditional form. My stories immerse the viewer in my visual memories. Though the viewer may not discern a clear direct storyline, I hope that they feel what I feel or remember about an

experience. The viewer should be transported to a place, react to a character, translate the unfamiliar, and, when possible, learn something.

My narratives include characters inspired by the people I meet who interact with each other or with me as the creator. They also include settings inspired by the colors, textures, geography, and architecture of places I have visited.

Though I create or recount a narrative about the people I meet and places I travel, the full storyline exists mainly to guide decision-making in each step of the design process. The viewer does not need to know the entire storyline; however, they should feel the essence of the story in the print and three-dimensional forms.

### **Where do I fit as a designer?**

Although I do consider my work a non-traditional type of branding, my final product does not fit within what is considered traditional graphic design. In addition, my skills intersect paths with textile designer, surface designer, and installation artist. Both put me in a unconventional category outside the classification of traditional graphic designer, which begs the question, “Where do I fit as a designer?”

Although I enjoy apparel design and the challenge it brings to my design process, I do not feel that a commitment solely to fashion would fulfill my design desires. I would like to continue designing for textiles and apparel but rejecting other sculptural forms would feel insufficient. I plan to explore rear projection, motion graphics, and other sculptural forms, so I would not label myself as fashion designer. The use of textile designer would be inadequate, because it does not communicate the use of sculptural qualities in the work. Surface designer seems to be the strongest definition for describing my work; however, it does not seem to fully convey the level of

my graphic design thinking and skills. Though designer seems to be the easiest fit, I still feel that graphic designer defines me. My hope is a group of graphic designers with the same skill set and interest grows to create a specialty within graphic design, in which we hold the titles of graphic designer for apparel design or graphic design for industrial design.

## RESEARCH

I discovered engineered prints in apparel design during its emergence in the fashion industry. While working for Tibi's corporate office in New York, I met a designer on the apparel design team, Ashley Miller. Miller was in the midst of designing prints for the Spring 2013 collection. I approached her for an informal interview and, in return, received a catalyst for investigation. Miller introduced me to digital textile printing, engineered prints, and the work of a designer who has influenced my investigation into engineered prints - Mary Katrantzou. Katrantzou has not only capitalized on the capabilities of digital textile printing and print engineering in apparel design, but she had infused a unique vision in her garments. She approaches the human form with an architectural vision and the print with a graphic designer's mindset:

Print and the printed images are strong advocates of communication and we can now do that on a global scale. The work communicates in a very direct way because its visual strength and can open up different avenues for discussion and further creation. That accessibility that didn't exist in the past, I believe, refines and trains the eye and ultimately leads to an evolution and heightened importance of applied design to form perception.<sup>7</sup>

Though Katrantzou cannot be attributed with being the first to use digital textile printing technology in apparel design, she elevated the scope of its application. Her ability to apply concept and communication sets her work apart from others in her industry.

Brands such as Alexander McQueen and Clover Canyon are using the technology similarly. Alexander McQueen's Spring 2009 collection titled *Natural Distinction Un-Natural Selection* was one of the first to garner attention for its use of engineered prints. The collection was "inspired by Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of*

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<sup>7</sup> Tamasin Doe. *The Print Revolution: Groundbreaking Digital Design in the Digital Age*, (Berkeley, CA, USA: Gingko Press, 2013), 6.

*Species* (1859)" and "evolution, Earth's raw materials, the Industrial Revolution and its effects and looking at concepts of nature versus technology."<sup>8</sup> The prints gained attention for their stunning technicality, but I am most attracted to their reinforcement of the concept. Each print portrays a particular raw material or animal relating to the concept controlling the design decisions as seen in Figures 10 A and B. Though McQueen used multiple prints for the Spring 2009 season, it was not a purely graphic design collection.

While McQueen partially infused graphic design on the professional runway, Katrantzou was completing her first Master of Arts collection at London's Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in 2008.<sup>9</sup> Inspired by objects that cannot be worn, Katrantzou looks to beautiful items from art and design. She began with the notion of putting objects on the female figure that one would not otherwise be able to wear if it were real. She revealed, " I take two or three details from reality, but everything else I build myself in a computer." Prints comprised of maximalist hyper-real layers are her aesthetic, which arose from her goal to achieve prints that cannot be created using traditional screen-printing.<sup>10</sup> "Silk-screen printing, either by hand or machine, has been the standard method of printing in the modern fashion age."<sup>11</sup> "Each extra color or

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<sup>8</sup> Katherine Gleason, *Alexander McQueen: Evolution*, (New York, New York: Race Point Publishing, 2012), 187.

<sup>9</sup> (Finnigan July 30, 2012)

<sup>10</sup> (Croft December 11, 2011)

<sup>11</sup> Tamasin Doe. *The Print Revolution: Groundbreaking Digital Design in the Digital Age*, (Berkeley, CA, USA: Gingko Press, 2013), 10.

screen raises the cost to the designer."<sup>12</sup> Due to the restraints of screen-printing, Katrantzou's designs would cost absurd amounts to produce with that process. Even still, she may have been able reach the rich affects she has with digital printing. However, the cost of printing such layered color in screen-printing is what makes her garments appear to be luxurious. The concept of hyper-real prints first appeared in her work as seen in Figure 10 C.<sup>13</sup> The collection was inspired by the idea of jewelry that would typically be too heavy for a person to wear. Playing with how the designs fit the female silhouette resulted in a show of trompe-l'oeil sheath dresses creating illusions on the contours. To maintain her distinct voice and continue reforming print design, Katrantzou maintains a labor-intensive goal. By choosing to avoid repetition of prints in the collection, she creates an original print for each silhouette. The abundance of concept, graphic design, and engineered prints made her a break out success and gained widespread attention. Her quick success catapulted her into the professional runway show arena at the Spring 2009 London Fashion Week. Having completed twelve runway collections, she has solidified her design style as seen in Figures 10 D and E. Due to "the explosion of interest in state-of-the-art textile design" and Kantrantzou's work bringing heightened awareness to the technology's abilities, others using engineered prints and graphic design concepts are forced define their own design style. Clover Canyon's Fall 2013 collection was poorly reviewed for owing too much to

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<sup>12</sup> Tamasin Doe. *The Print Revolution: Groundbreaking Digital Design in the Digital Age*, (Berkeley, CA, USA: Gingko Press, 2013), 10.

<sup>13</sup> (Tee May 21, 2010)

the influence of Mary Katrantzou than to his concept as seen in Figure 10 F.<sup>14</sup> Because the end result in McQueen, Katrantzou, and Clover Canyon's industry is always a garment and the technology lends itself to an intense use of color, it is imperative that designers employ strong graphic design thinking and develop a distinct style in order to create distinct work. Though Katrantzou and others using the technology inspire me, my goal was to develop my own style, process, and graphic design concepts to test the abilities of the technology on multiple surfaces.



Figure 10 Apparel designs featuring digital textile printing A. Alexander McQueen Spring 2009,<sup>15</sup> B. Alexander McQueen Spring 2009,<sup>16</sup> C. Mary Katrantzou's MA collection,<sup>17</sup> D. Mary Katrantzou,<sup>18</sup> E. Mary Katrantzou Resort 2014,<sup>19</sup> F. Clover Canyon Fall 2013<sup>20</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Porter March 13, 2011

<sup>15</sup> Madelra October 2, 2008

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> "Mary Katrantzou Biography"

<sup>18</sup> Vlamos February 21, 2011

<sup>19</sup> Katrantzou June 19, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Porter March 13, 2011

## RESULTS

People and places inspire me. Like Cezanne, I found inspiration in the south of France and Tuscany. My need to practice the French language and fascination with researching the architecture, food, and culture of the area made the south of France and Tuscany the top of my wanderlust list.

I found I have a habit of traveling to a place in my mind before I have even visited. Prior to traveling, I saw images of each place and studied the culture. Though some of what I perceived prior to visiting was quickly corrected, which might cause disillusionment for some, the personal experience was exceptionally inspirationally rich. The three main regions of the trip include Provence, Côte d'Azur, and Toscana. In each area, there were unexpected characters and intriguing colors and textures. There were commonalities among the areas, but they mainly stood apart with their own personalities.

With such an enthralling experience, there are numerous moments and visuals to recap. Part of the design challenge is choosing which parts of the story to tell through design in order to give the viewer the same feeling. For this reason, the experience or the narrative is narrowed down to its most significant parts.

### **The Experience**

A drive from Marseille to Aix-En-Provence after twenty-four hours of traveling began the trip. The excitement eventually gave way to chaos due to our inability to enter the GPS coordinates of our Airbnb destination. It should have been a red flag when the residence did not provide an address. After driving for three hours when it should have



taken one hour, we found the home. We also found out Mary, our host, was conveniently out of town on annual French holiday.

Provence 2: Instead we met Bernard, her father. He was an older man who surprised us with his very tiny swim trunks. Surprise occurred several times more. The home, more of a compound where the entire family lived, was on the edge of the mountain with a sprawling view of the valley below. Mary's sister was spending her holiday at the family residence. At some exterior doorways, there were not even doors; rather, beaded curtains. When asked about a key, Bernard and Mary's sister scoffed and laughed, "We do not have keys. Just do not tell anyone in the city." It was a beautiful spread of lived-in Provincial homes with no security. I realized the family and their ways were not all black and white.

Provence 3: Having mentioned the day before that I wanted to find fields of lavender, we woke up to find a note from Mary's sister including a route around the Luberon mountain range with cities to stop and visit and fields to find. We went in search of lavender and instead found a mountain full of sunflower fields and medieval hill top towns of cobblestone and blue shutters. We only saw a single unharvested lavender field. The people and pace of Provence were quiet, standoffish, but pleasant.

Côte d'Azur 1: Next, we were off to the coast. It was a sea of botanical and architectural colors against the jagged gray rock of the coast and the rocky shores. The people and Niçoise salads of Juan les Pins, Nice and Antibes were bright and vibrant. The facades were the same color as the sorbet and the ground was a dizzying patchwork of black and white tiles. Though the cities and beaches were jammed with sunbathers, we got to know more architecture than people.

Côte d'Azur 2: The rocky beaches were filled with bodies and umbrellas. The bold and confident topless nudity was somehow reserved. All ages of women, even children, and all sizes participated and each seemed as comfortable, self-assured, and unaware as the next. On our next trip to lay and swim, we traded the tiny rocks for quieter and secluded cliff sides.

Côte d'Azur 3: The next few days were spent hopping from one city to the next. We took a detour to the other French coast of Corsica, an island just south of France. Lesser known to outsiders but well known to the French, the island was a mix of mountainous hiking and botanical coastal cities.

Toscana 1: Back to mainland, we traveled to Sienna, Italy. The Duomo di Siena was the only cathedral we entered during the entire fourteen-day trip. The exterior was a green and white stripe as opposed the typical black and white Italian Gothic style I expected. When I finally did see the black and white striped Gothic style, I was pleasantly swayed. The stripe was the simplicity needed to highlight the graphic shapes of the intricate architecture details.

Toscana 2: Then we were off to Florence. Recommended by graphic designer Louise Fili in her book *The Civilized Shopper's Guide to Florence*, I was determined to meet Francesco di Firenze for my own pair of Italian leather custom sandals. He and I communicated predominantly with sign language to create the sartorial souvenir. Our day of leather hunting was complete after we acquired a few items from the open-air leather markets and gloves from Madova, picked up my custom made sandals, and a visited Scuola del Cuoio, the church-run leather school where we watched artisans make their goods.

Toscana 3: To end our trip, I checked off one more item on my bucket list – a Vespa tour of Chianti wine region. I have always wanted to see the Tuscan countryside and own a Vespa. Never having actually driven a Vespa, my fright while test-driving immediately led me to envision crashing, causing a huge accident, and landing in Italian prison. The alternative, riding passenger, turned out to be the best way to experience and see the scope of Chianti region.

### **The Design**

Though Provence, Côte d'Azur, and Toscana, each have distinct personalities, their neighboring relation keeps some common elements fluid in the transition. The arch is prevalent in architecture throughout the areas. For this reason, it became a defining element in the garments. I chose to represent the experience with textile designs on apparel and umbrellas, which are two more defining elements of the people and places. Each beach or hotel used a defining stripe or color on its umbrellas. When viewing the beach side from the top of a hill or hotel, the beaches were spotted with groups of defining umbrella designs. Apparel, or sometimes lack of, appeared to keep its distinctly European shapes, but fabrics and styling changed from one area to the next. The change in clothing dictated my design of each garments' silhouette, known as apparel pattern-making in the fashion industry.

### **Pattern-making**

I created three silhouettes based on the personality of Provence, Côte d'Azur, and Toscana. All of which include clean simple lines in order to enhance the print that will adorn them. Hand created pattern-making can be seen in Figure 11 and 12.

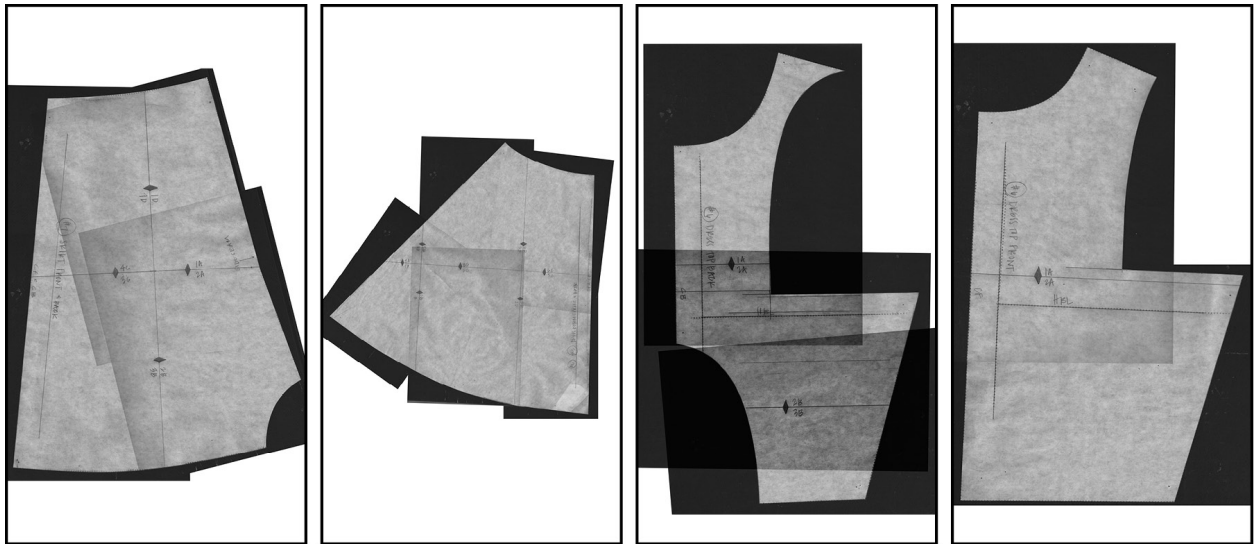


Figure 11 Hand created pattern-making scanned and matched to make digital patterns

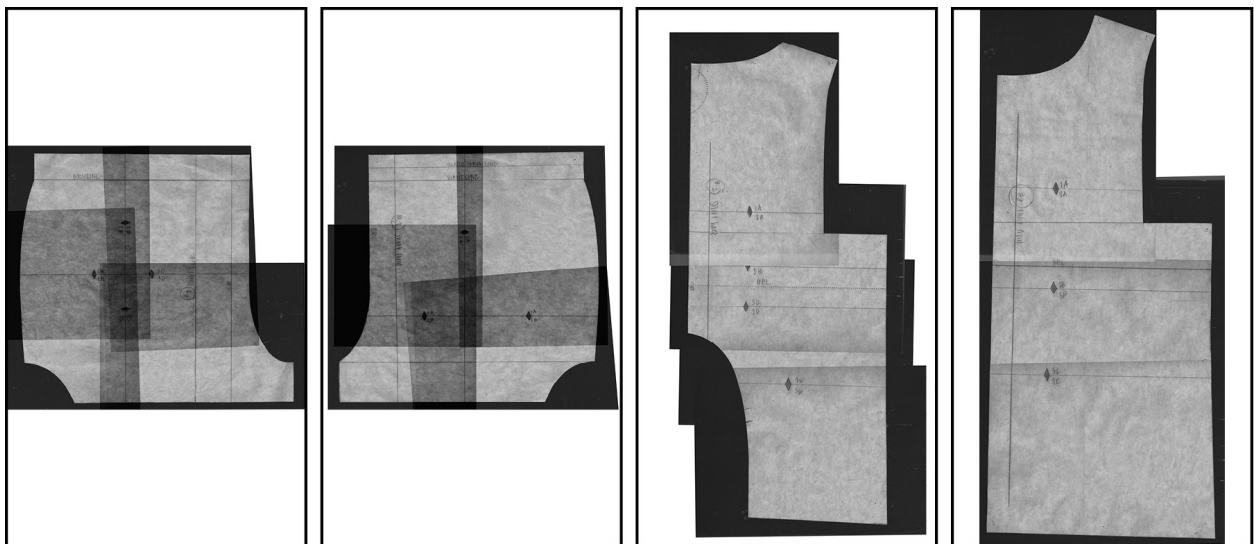


Figure 12 Hand created pattern-making scanned and matched to make digital patterns

Digital pattern-making can be seen in Figures 13, 14, and 15. Provence's silhouette is a sleeveless shirt and skirt reminiscent of the attire Mary's sister wore when we first met. The shirt features an arch cut out at the center back representing the surprise I felt several times while in Provence. Côte d'Azur's silhouette is a crop top and shorts. The skin-revealing silhouette is evocative of the people of the coast's comfort level with nudity and showing their bodies. The crop top features the same arch cut out at the

back and arch cut out at the side seams of the shorts, which keeps consistent with the notion that the change in regional personalities is fluid. Toscana's silhouette is a sleeveless dress with arch cut out at the center back. The dress, typically reserved for elegant or refined occasions, represents the Italian concept of *Bella Figura* and tradition of *La Passeggiata*. *Bella Figura*, literally translated as beautiful figure, "is not only about looking good...but encompasses inherent dignity and the awareness that certain circumstances require certain behavior."<sup>21</sup> With this mindset, *La Passeggiata*, the Italian social tradition of an evening walk through the city's main street in a piazza or church square is a logical ritual. While lapping the street at a languid pace, "people of all ages, meticulously dressed, intent on seeing and being seen, boisterously chatter while keeping a watchful eye on everything and everyone around them."<sup>22</sup>

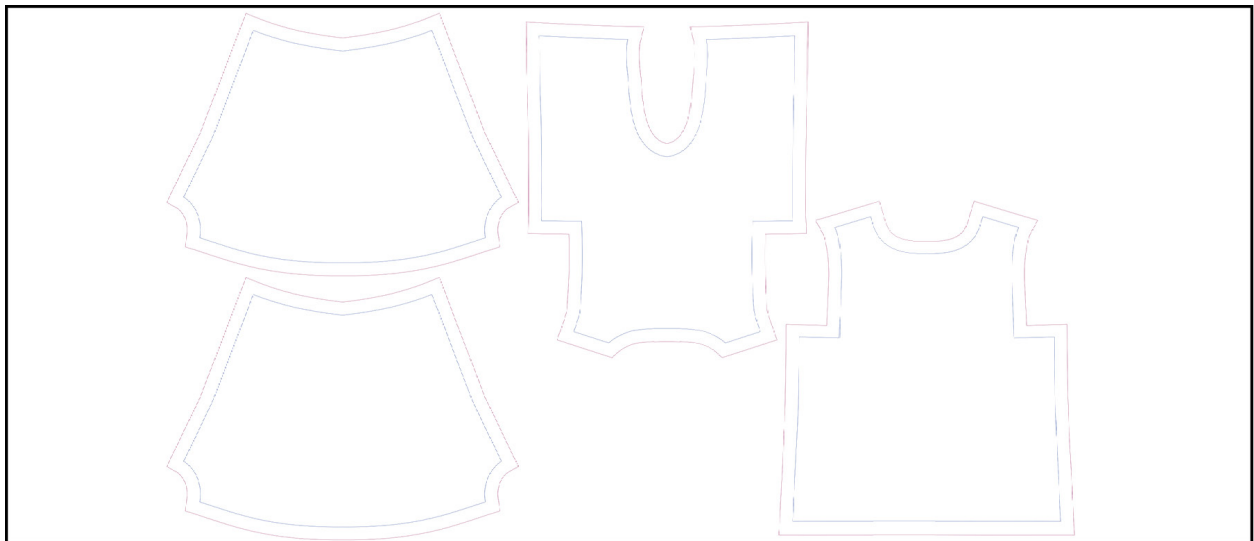


Figure 13 Digital patterns created for *Provence*

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<sup>21</sup> Louise Fili, and Lise Apatoff, *Italianissimo: The Quintessential Guide To What Italians Do Best*, (New York, New York: The Little Bookroom, 2008). 14.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 86.

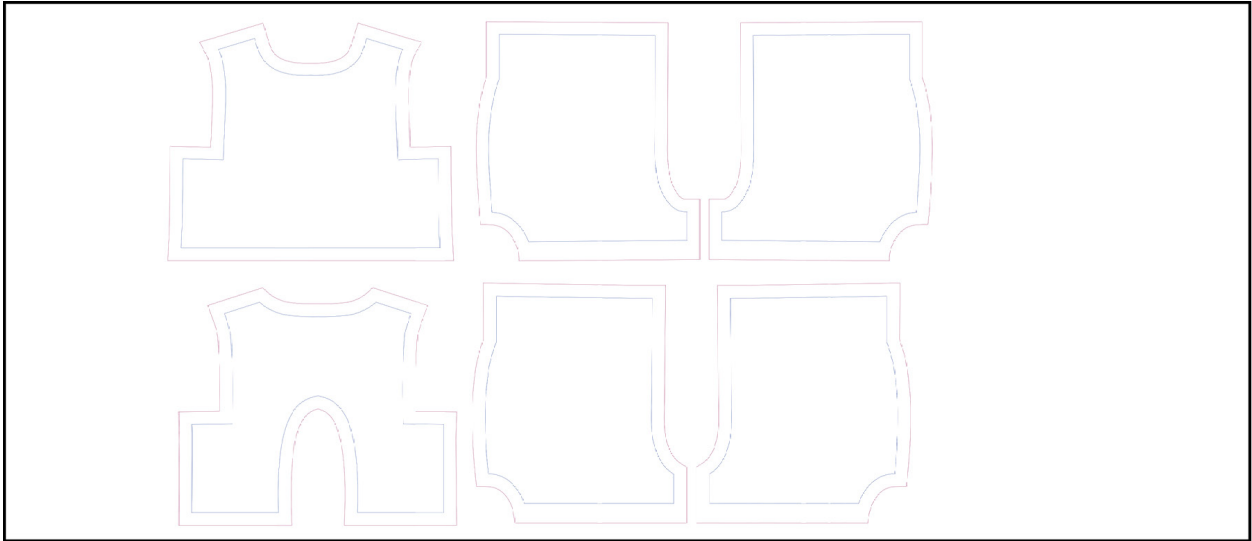


Figure 14 Digital patterns created for *Côte d'Azur*



Figure 15 Digital patterns created for *Toscana*

## Order

The narrative dictated the order in which the garments would physically be arranged in an exhibition space. Provence, Côte d'Azur, and Toscana each have their own silhouette, but each use the others' in order to create a pace of movement through the physical arrangement of the work. Because each area uses the pattern-making silhouette of its own area and the others', each area has three garments designed for it. Therefore, there are nine total garments created. The order in which the silhouette of

the garment was chosen reiterates the movement of place to place in the narrative. The second garment in the series of three in each area typifies the area. For this reason, the second garment features both the pattern-making silhouette of its area and the illustration of its area. The third garment in the series of three features the pattern-making silhouette of the area next in the story. The designation of the second and third garment silhouettes in each series of three leaves the first garment in the series to feature the pattern-making silhouette of the area that came before. By moving through the garments in this order, a pace is created and the viewer moves full circle through the narrative.

## Visuals

Since my design process includes illustrating, abstracting the illustration, and creating prints, I began with choosing my illustration elements and color palette. Each area's color palette consisted of four colors. Grey and white were two colors present in each area's palette. In my illustrations, I typically include hand illustration and vector illustration as seen in Figure 16.

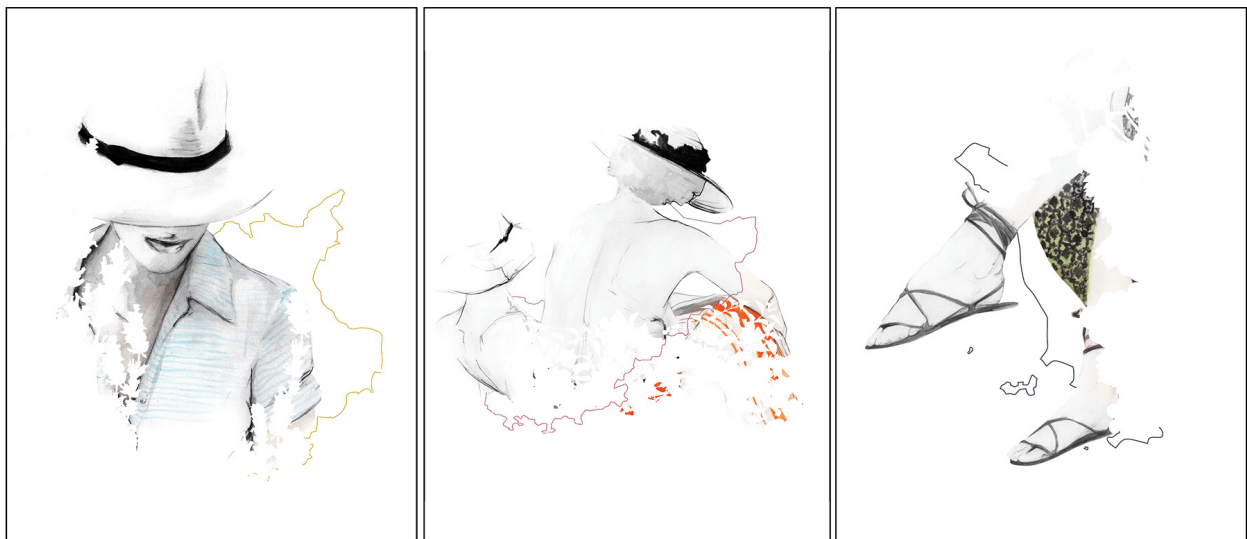


Figure 16 Illustrations A. *Provence*, B. *Côte d'Azur*, C. *Toscana*

Provence's illustration is of Mary's sister overlaid with the lavender we were in search of as seen in Figure 16 A. Blue was chosen to represent the shutters of the provincial mountain top homes. Yellow represents the sunflower fields we found instead. Côte d'Azur's illustration is of two women on the beach indicative of their comfort level and presence. It is overlaid with the tropical blossoms of Antibes. Orange and pink tones were chosen highlight the architectural landscape as seen in Figure 16 B. Toscana's illustration features the custom made Italian leather sandals. The design of the woman's skirt derives from the ceramic designs of the Italian countryside homes. The illustration is overlaid with Chianti wine vines. Navy was chosen to highlight the Chianti wine grape tones. Green was chosen to represent the green of the Duomo di Siena as well as the vineyard vines that cut through the landscape as seen in Figure 16 C. Also, the geographic outline of each area is present in the illustration, which divides the illustration from black and white to full color.

### **Abstraction and Print**

For each area, an element was chosen to abstract the illustration, which can be seen in Figure 17 A, B, and C. The element chosen to abstract the Provence illustration was the uneven cobblestones that pave both the city streets and walls throughout the Provincial medieval towns. Côte d'Azur's illustration was abstracted by the rectangular dizzying patchwork of black and white tiles of Nice's main streets. The architectural shapes present between stripes in the Duomo di Siena's Gothic style abstracted Toscana's illustration.



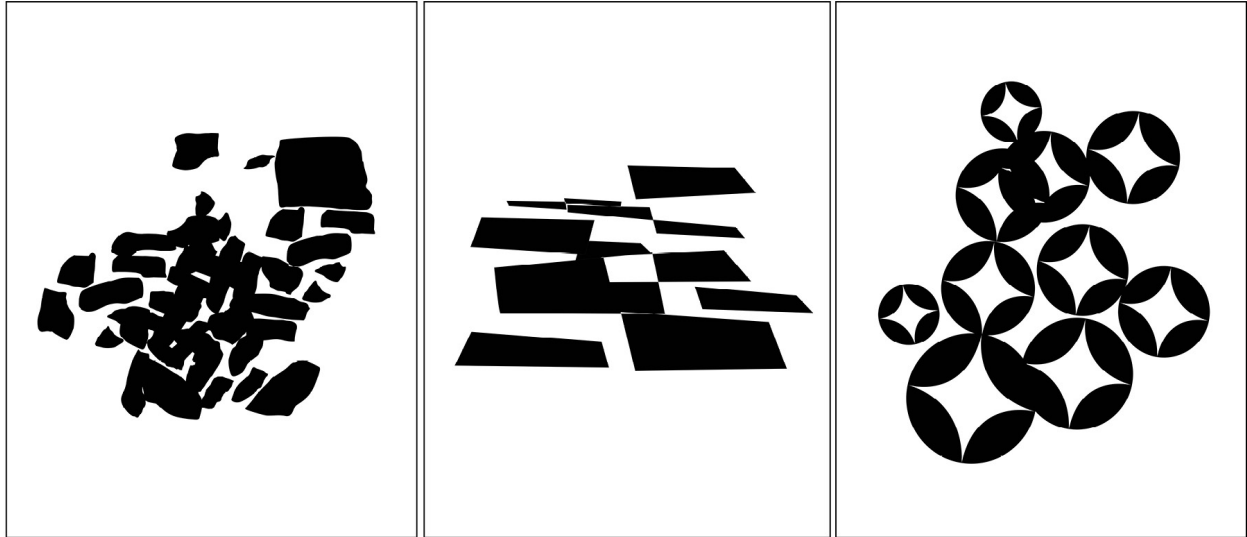


Figure 17 Abstractions A. *Provence*, B. *Côte d'Azur*, C. *Toscana*

The abstracted illustration, as seen in Figure 18, was used to build each area's print. I flipped, reflected, turned, multiplied, and repeated the abstraction in order to build a print that felt like the area. Provence's print feels mountainous, curious, but also quiet and calm. Côte d'Azur's print feels bright, airy, angular and rocky. Toscana's print feels architectural, ethereal, organic, and sleek. The prints embody the essence of what I experienced in each area, which can be seen in Figure 19.



Figure 18 Abstracted Illustrations A. *Provence*, B. *Côte d'Azur*, C. *Toscana*

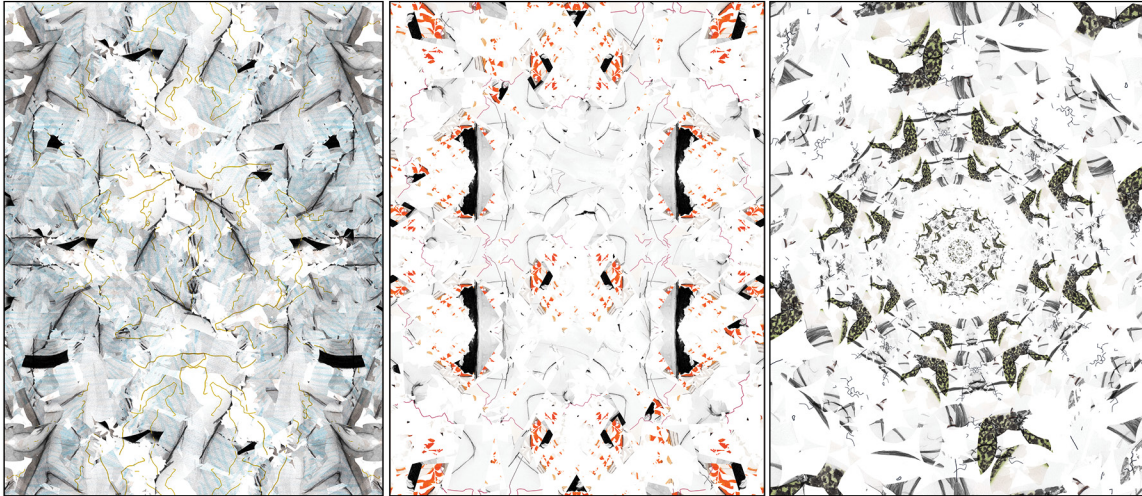


Figure 19 Prints A. *Provence*, B. *Côte d'Azur*, C. *Toscana*

## Engineered Prints

The prints, hand illustration, vector illustration, and abstractions became my elements for creating each garment's engineered prints. Using the order and the breakdown of the experience as previously described, the prints were engineered for each garment, which can be seen in Figures 20, 21, and 22.

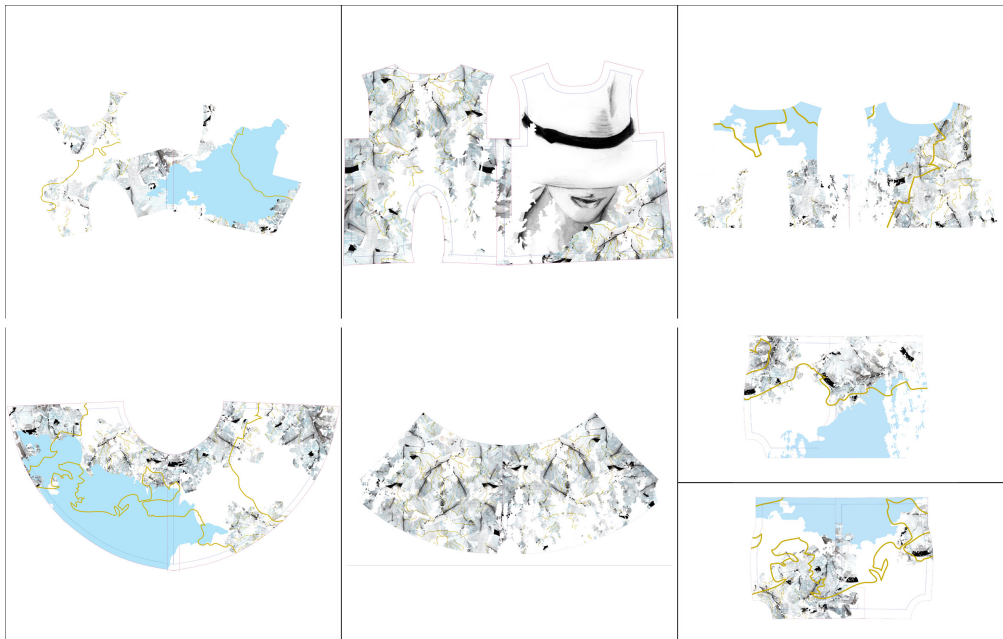


Figure 20 Garment A. *Provence* engineered print on *Toscana* pattern-making, B. *Provence* engineered print on *Provence* pattern-making, C. *Provence* engineered print on *Côte d'Azur* pattern-making

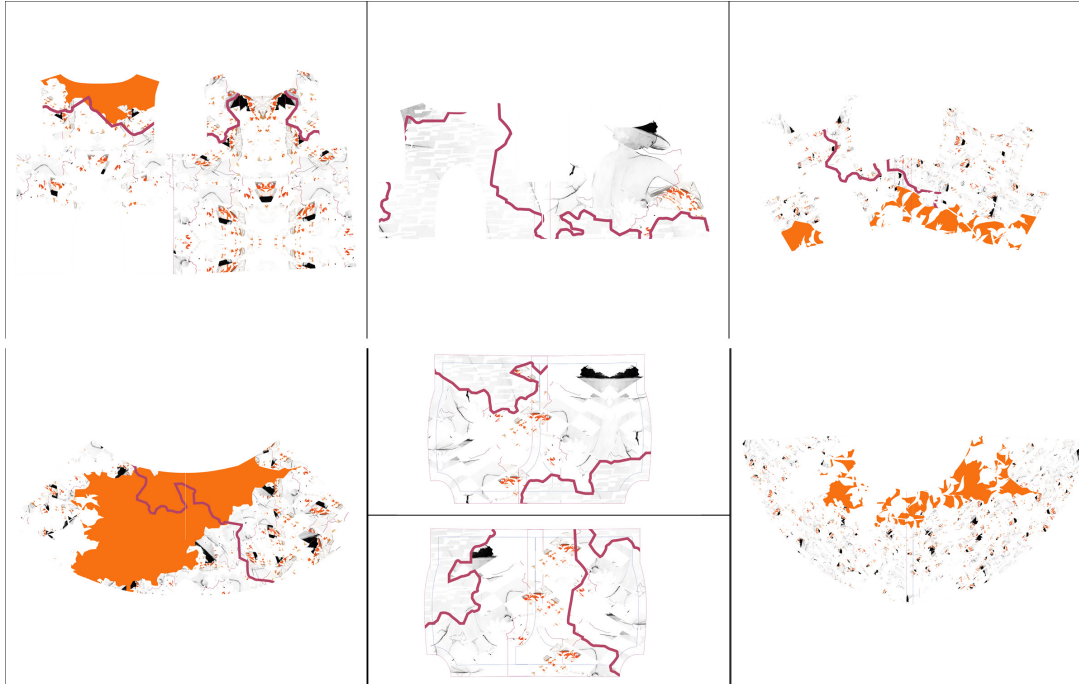


Figure 21 Garment A. Côte d'Azur engineered print on *Provence* pattern-making, B. Côte d'Azur engineered print on Côte d'Azur pattern-making, C. Côte d'Azur engineered print on *Toscana* pattern-making

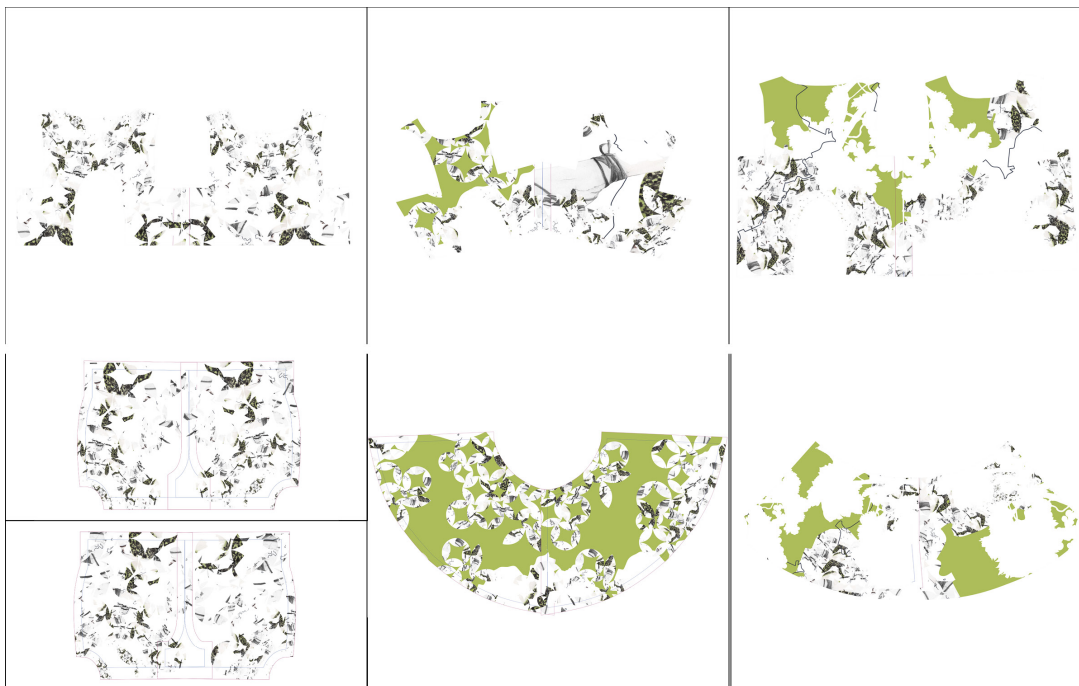


Figure 22 Garment A. *Toscana* engineered print on Côte d'Azur pattern-making, B. *Toscana* engineered print on *Toscana* pattern-making, C. *Toscana* engineered print on *Provence* pattern-making

## Signage

In order to inform the viewer of my process, I created wayfinding signage to show the elements used to build each area's designs in the exhibition. The geographic region is painted on the wall with square pop outs near the painting. The main pop out tells the narrative of the region. The accompanying pop outs feature the illustration, abstraction, and print used to create the engineered prints.

Though I feel I have reached a balance for revealing my process and giving the viewer enough information to understand that the print derives from the illustration, the way finding signage provides further clarification.

## Outcome

The Provence, Côte d'Azur, and Toscana work has given me a stronger understanding of my narrative building, allowed me to refine the design process I experimented with in the *Matilda* work, and has taught me about the logistics and technology of digital textile printing. I have a strong and exciting equation for creating work and continuing experimentation with different materials in order to create my storied surfaces. Just as the *Matilda* work helped me to understand my process and left me with questions to consider, my thesis exhibition did the same.

I initially planned to include three nine-foot umbrellas in the rafters of the exhibition space. Each would correspond with one of the three areas. It was a natural decision to choose three since there were three areas, three pattern-making styles, and three garments per area. However, upon beginning design and analyzing the choice further, I chose to produce one umbrella, which acted as a type of compass at the center of the exhibition space as seen in Figure 23.





Figure 23 Exhibition Space: Entry

Additionally, plans for the hanging of the garments changed. Originally, I planned to hang the garments in the same direction as the viewer traveled through the story, while keeping the flow organic, filling the space in order to achieve the feeling of immersion. I painted and joined multiple wooden beams to cross over the existing metal rafter frames in order to provide more points for hanging the garments. Due to the weight of the garments and the cluttered feeling, I changed the plans to follow the “L” shape of the rafters, which kept with the direction of travel in the narratives as seen in Figures 23 and 24.

As for the surrounding walls, my first instinct was to keep them blank. Then, due to my previous question concerning the amount of the story the viewer should have, I decided to create signage.



Figure 24 Exhibition Space: Back Wall

The signage was originally intended to overlay a painted geographic shape, which would be mounted behind the garments. Once again, the room felt cluttered and pathways for reading were unclear. I reworked the space to include a painted geographic region behind the garments, which made it clear where the viewer was in the story. The signage was moved to the center pathway between each series of garments to allow the viewer to walk in and out of the center of the room using the full space as seen in Figures 25, 26, and 27. The final installation in the space provided the open airy feeling needed to take in the complex design of each garment. Although I felt the exhibition was a success, I found room for improvement for future exhibitions. In an effort to fully explain my process for the purpose of defending my thesis, I included the full story in the signage as seen in figure.



Figure 25 Signage: *Provence*

Figure 26 Signage: Côte d'Azur



Figure 27 Signage: *Toscana*

Upon further analysis, I realize that choice may have created a disconnection for the viewer between the signage and the garment and umbrella designs. Because the work is abstract and the inclusion of the full story is representative, the jump from reading to looking might have left the viewer confused. In the future, I need to make the commitment to remain abstract. With future work, I plan to include a significant idea or word that gives the viewer just enough information needed to understand the work without over telling the story in order to match the style of the work.

Analyzing the representational and abstracted aspects of the exhibition led me to a larger question. “What does abstraction do that representational does not?” Abstracting the design and the story creates fragments that reinforce my narratives. My hope is the viewer takes another look and reconsiders the familiar and unfamiliar.



Understanding my need to abstract the representational is a question I will continue to consider and comprehend as I continue creating work.

## **Outlook**

After completing my degree, I plan to continue making work and pursue other surfaces, sculptural forms, and narratives. My hope is to collaborate with designers in other fields such as pattern-makers, apparel designers, digital artists, and industrial designers to create work. My hope is that through collaboration I will be able to focus on my process, define the overarching design concept, and enlist the skills of others who are more knowledgeable in other design areas in order to create a stronger product. My highest goal is to combine these efforts in one design studio inspired by the structure of post World War II design studios like that of Charles and Ray Eames. Creating designs for case study homes, furniture, exhibitions, and films, “they projected their singular vision” and “fractured and refracted whatever caught their interest, gaining insight as they assiduously followed the path of the chosen subject of their intellectual focus.”<sup>23</sup> Like Charles and Ray Eames, I want to create an environment for producing my storied surfaces.

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<sup>23</sup> Koenig Gloria, *Charles and Ray Eames: 1907-1978, 1912-1988 Pioneers of Mid-Century Modernism*, (Germany: TASCHEN, 2005), 7.

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## VITA

Graphic designer Courtney Marse is blurring the lines between surface designer, apparel designer, and textile designer. Her work explores the illustrated and abstracted narrative and its application to three-dimensional surfaces such as engineered prints for apparel and environmental design. Following four years of full-time and freelance design experience for clients both locally and nationally, she decided to take on the toughest client of all, herself, and pursue a Master of Fine Arts in Graphic Design at Louisiana State University. Shortly after entering the MFA program, she received a coveted internship with fashion design house Tibi New York. Her work has been featured at LSU Foster Gallery and as a juried artist at the 2013 Uncommon Thread Wearable Art show. In addition, she has conducted artist lectures for LSU graphic design undergraduate students and art activities for the Brusly Elementary Head Start program. Upon graduating this spring, she plans to move to New Orleans and prepare to present at the Spring/Summer New Orleans Fashion Week this fall. Currently, she is creating a follow up collection of work, and collaborating with apparel designers to create print designs for a capsule collection. Contact information and more work can be found at [courtneymarse.com](http://courtneymarse.com).