In the Garden

Clare Samani

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IN THE GARDEN

A Thesis

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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

Clare Samani
B.F.A. Cal State Long Beach 2017
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Abstract

My work has focused largely on identity and self-expression, primarily through clothing, pattern, and color as symbolic content. Having heavily investigated historical costume and clothing from various periods, my attention was drawn to the highly sculptural and ornamented garments of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the rococo, and the baroque. In these colorful and puffed garments, I am attracted to the similarities that I see in nature. How we adorn ourselves mimics various flowers, plants and animals in the pursuit of desire and procreation. Focusing on fabric manipulation, printmaking and sculpture, In the Garden coalesces into ambiguous sculptures that represent beauty, garishness, nature and desire.
Introduction

Beauty was unknown to me. Growing up I was aware of beauty and that it was something that I must one day achieve. But it was always in the periphery, I was raised mostly by my father during my early childhood because my mother was the major breadwinner, not to say she was not around because she was. As a young girl the only ideals and mentions of beauty came from the T.V. or advertisements. I was content to run around the garden, or work on the car or in the kitchen alongside my father. People would call me pretty and say I had nice eyes but at that age it was useless information to have. The older I got and subsequently the fatter I got the more I was aware that I did not conform to the type of beauty my father and mother aspired for me. Often my weight would be mentioned in a disapproving tone. As I developed, I also was taught to cover myself up more. ‘Too much flesh showing’. During my adolescence I figured out that my body did not conform. It was not right in some way or another.

Beauty was something that some girls were taught from a young age. How to braid hair, make-up techniques, ways to look pretty. It was all stuff I never really learned how to do. As my mother was never ultra-feminine, I can’t recall her teaching me these things. Me and my best friend would occasionally play with make up or dress up like many other girls do, but I was never indoctrinated into the cult of beauty. Perhaps because I was mostly around my father and brother, perhaps I never showed interest to my mother, or perhaps because of my body it was hard to feel beautiful. This absence and derision of my weight created a longing and aspiration to be beautiful in my later years. It holds interest for me as something I have struggled with for a large portion of my life. This system and set of rules and expectations is something that we all in some way have to face and participate in. Beauty as a social endeavor, the art of making oneself appear enticing and attractive.
My work has focused largely on identity and self-expression, primarily through clothing, pattern, and color as a symbolic material. My research encompasses historical costume and clothing from various periods, my attention is drawn to the highly sculptural and ornamented garments of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the rococo, and the baroque. In these colorful and puffed garments, I am attracted to the similarities that I see in nature. How we adorn ourselves mimics various flowers, plants and animals in the pursuit of desire and procreation. In the book *Botany of Desire*, author and journalist Michael Pollan, describes succinctly the commonality found in the yearning and aspirations of both flower and human being,

“All those plants care about is what every being cares about on the most basic genetic level: making more copies of itself”¹

In our basest longing and desire as humans to be beautiful, lies the most universal aim on the planet, for companionship and proliferation of our genetic makeup. All the artistry and garbed inventiveness that we focus on, are all tools used to ensure that we are successful progenitors. In my research I focus on exaggerated historical dress practices that converge around desire and reproduction. This thesis is a focused exploration of Western historical dress practices and beauty standards that are specific to the established time and place and gender norms of the Renaissance, middle ages, and the rococo.

My material research explores fabric manipulation techniques of western historical fashion, as well as organic natural forms found in nature. My aim is to examine the dichotomy of desire and repulsion through forms from both the artificial and natural world. I believe how we as humans dress ourselves is an elaborate and garish mating ritual, and as such, our dress function much like

the petal of a flower—for the basic and most elemental of reasons: to procreate. In this paper I will speak about historical European fashion trends and practices, westernized beauty and clothing in regards to identity, how dress functions as indicators for procreation, nature and the similarities found between flora as well as fauna, and lastly write about the material process and resulting formal and visual content.

**Dress practices through history**

The way we dress is a huge indicator to many things, our wealth, our ability to understand current trends, and the suitability of our body to potential partners. My research is inspired by highly manipulated garments that strive to display the human body in its most ‘desirable’ form. These articles serve to contort or emphasis the body in extreme ways. Historically the westernized canon is rife with examples of garish and extreme body modification and adornment.

Two fitting examples of these in history are the farthingale and the bum roll. The farthingale was popular in the 16th century, made of either wood or boning and pushed the skirts outward in a hoop structure. The bum roll was worn in the early 17th century and was a padded tie that went around the low waist, it further enhanced the hips and helped to stabilize the garment. Author of *Corsets & Codpieces*, Karen Bowmen touches on the subliminal message wearing a bum roll had on the desirability of the wearer,
“The way in which the farthingale was worn created the illusion of a long torso and shorter legs, which alluded to, in the case of younger women, a childbearing figure.” 2

Women would constrict their waist, widen their hips and lift their bosom. These all served to create a hypersexualized form of the wearer. Which in turn made the figure more attractive to the male viewer.

Far from being only a feminine endeavor, men also participated in the rituals of social behavior as dictated by clothing. One obvious example, though there are many, is the codpiece. The codpiece reached its zenith in decoration and design in the 1540’s. Besides being highly decorative they were also used as means of protection and symbols of manliness sometimes adorned with ribbons and bows. Historian and author of Corsets & Codpieces Karen Bowmen goes into depth on the visual and psychological reasons that men partook in wearing codpieces,

“It was also thought that the men whose virility was in question sported the biggest and most decorative codpieces to emphasis their masculinity.”3


Another example is male hose or breeches, made to accentuate the leg, the hose took many forms, but was often overabundant with stuffing, creating a thick inflated silhouette.

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This trunk hose was most commonly worn during the Northern renaissance. The Venetian hose, fully overinflated and dramatically changing the silhouette of the thigh and buttock is pictured on the far left. On the inner left is the picadells trunk hose, widely arcing out from the hips and stopping before reaching mid-thigh. The two right figures are both wearing a version of the short trunk hose, but the man in the middle is wearing another garment called canion in addition, going to the knee like the Venetian but not as exaggerated a silhouette.

While in the time these practices were commonplace and even thought of as appealing, when we look back, we recognize the extremity and monstrous ridiculousness of these overblown articles.

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of clothing. The garish color and pattern as well as the overabundance of form and material. Looking at the trunk hose pictured above, the virility of the male thigh is the focus, yet to me it resembles the tulip, elegantly and ludicrously crying out for attention. Finding both the beauty and the strangeness of these items is where I find my inspiration. We can find commonality between what we wear and how we draw attention to ourselves and how a flower might as well. With shape, color and outrageous pageantry.

All these clothes, and practices of wearing them, were important as a means of functioning and communicating. They conveyed wealth and the ability to provide for offspring, display of a healthy body, as well as attracting the right lover or potential partner. Wealth and class are often an indicator of current trends in fashion. Often lower classes do their best to imitate and adorn, though the results are never as decadent or outrageous. Wealth often breeds extravagance, in clothes and manner. It is in this extravagance of form and abundance of material that I find my inspiration.

**Beauty: Hair and Flesh, Clothing and Fashion**

In the introduction to the book *Dress and Identity*, authors Mary Roach-Higgen and Joanne Eicher speak to the elaborate and consuming role of beatification,

“*Other animal species groom themselves and make social gestures toward grooming each other; but as human beings we far outdistance them in regard to the amount of time and resources devoted to preparing our bodies for presentation to ourselves and others.*”

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Fashion, body modification and adornment practices are an integral part of finding a mate or partner. Beauty is vital to survival, while beauty standards change and are relative to culture some things remain constant. Beauty as it pertains to westernized historical patterns changes dramatically over time but remains fixed in its alteration of the human body.

We use fashion as a way to communicate, it gives us the tools to perform the rituals that we are prescribed by the time and place in which we exist as a member of society. We use this language to speak to our circumstances, our mental state, as well as our predetermined aspirations. Through fashion, we have cultivated and falsified our way into attracting another person. The elaborate clothing that cinches the waist, and emphasizes the butt, plumps the breast, and even accentuates the penis. Famous and prolific fashion designer Steve McQueen speaks on the importance of clothing trends and its impact on mating rituals,

“People forget what fashion has always been about. It’s about attracting a mate. It’s about sexuality, it’s about showing a person who you are.”

Fashion, embellishment, modification and adornment are all ways in which humans alter their appearance in order to appear more desirable. Unlike a flower that naturally blooms and beckons their pollinator, humans have to groom themselves in order to achieve the same outcome.

As discussed in the previous section, body modification was a common practice that was considered necessary in upper class fashion which involved the manipulation of the body into certain shapes through altering the muscular and skeletal system. Other examples of body modifications include the transformation of hair, skin, nails, teeth and breath.

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7 Ettegudi, Peter and Ian Bonhôte, directors. *McQueen*. 8 June 2018.
Another important aspect of physical beauty and body display is hair. How one would style their hair transformed even more rapidly than dress practices. For instance, the techniques of styling your hair could go through three to four notable changes before dress practices significantly changed. These changes were subject to scrutiny and affected both male and female bodies. Though women’s costume as it pertained to hair has traditionally been more elaborate. Men’s hair and beard length were also considered to be an integral component of beauty rituals and what was acceptable at the time. The appropriate grooming according to the times changed dramatically and could be incredibly elaborate. Though the universal important factors would always be healthy strong strands, vivid and deep color, and cleanliness.

In the sculpture, *The Lonely Flowers*, I have pleated leather laying underneath bra pad inserts. The intention was to use props of sexual artifice, i.e. bra pads that both support and enlarge breasts. Using tools of fashion, the bra pads are a nod to the constructs of society that call for the shaping and lifting of the bosom. Instead of nipples there are perforations that ring around a large
recess. From the recess springs hair in abundance. This becomes the ‘flower’ in which the petals, pleated leather surround and decorate as if surrounding the décolletage. The hair cascades out of where the nipples might be, visually they look like stalks of a dying flower. My intention was to have hair growing from parts of the anatomy that would be deemed gross or undesirable. The shift in color serves to bring the viewers eye downward, but also hints at the age of the hair itself, the graying hair transforming the youthfulness of the woman or flower. While the hair is beautiful and thick in its lustrousness, the placement from these orifices were intended to leave the viewer uncomfortable. The title, *The Lonely Flower*, implies that these were not the most beautiful or in vogue flowers of its time. Left on the shelf, shriveled in its idle state. The hair was also not highly modified by teasing or shaping, instead choosing to let it cascade down in its ‘natural’ state.

Displayed in conjunction with *Lonely Flowers* is *Henry*. The sculpture for me represents femininity, both in its color and shape. The sculpture has an understructure of a codpiece that only becomes apparent on close inspection. This masculine and feminine combination makes references to my own struggle with feminine beauty. This sculpture is both beautiful and repellent to me, garish in its showy and artificial pinkness. The fibers are synthetic curtain trim that has been cut and combed out to create a fuzzy wild texture, as well as left whole for visual variety. Collaged together with various ribbon, this sculpture talks about the impersonation we perform in order to follow the dress practices and dictates of beauty, especially under the standards of gender.
The clothes we wear often signify how we think of ourselves, how we perform in society, what are we looking for. Visual cues where the eye of the beholder is supreme. We adorn ourselves according to the fashions of our time to participate in the elaborate social construct that allows us to be successful, to achieve our goals. How we wear an item of clothing can speak to our confidence and how in tune we are with what is deemed in vogue. How one’s figure looks in a garment can either attract or repel a potential partner. This is often carried out in extremes, through garments that modify the shape of the body. Body supplements where also common practice in historical clothing and is a practice that persists today. Using articles that wrap, suspend or add shape to the body are all common categories of supplementing. For example, as discussed in the previous section the Elizabethan bum roll is a pre-shaped circular wrap that ties around the waist and alters the outline of the body.
In the piece *Coveted* I am thinking heavily about beauty and my own body. I am using the understructure of a bum roll for composition and shape. Using the bum roll was important in this piece in that to me it resembles rolls of flesh. The overabundance of flesh that was desired in the Elizabethan era, as opposed to now, when copious amounts of flesh are seen as undesirable. Using a smocking machine, I gathered the soft pink material until it created both a soft enticing surface as well as a repellent texture that resembles some invertebrate bug or long worm. I imagine the fabric as a gathering of flesh, with soft pink hues. The smocked ‘skin’ fabric is joined together using corset stays on the inside of the fabric/bum roll and finally tied together using human hair. This hair while lustrous, coils upon itself, getting tangled in a mass. It resists the impetus to be tamed or modified.

![Image 5. Coveted, 2020.](image)

The beauty standards for men and women were dramatically different in many ways but especially in shape and material. In men’s beatification of body and profile and we often see
rigid silhouettes, from the inner garment out. While women’s clothing was equally restricting and rigid in the use of undergarments, that structure was rarely seen and often obscured by the voluminous outer layers. The layers that were visible were often tailored to evoke feelings of softness, as if eluding to the supple flesh underneath. This became very apparent during the rococo with elaborate hairstyles as well as frothy gowns. Keeping up with these practices and changes were paramount. If we were a butterfly that was often preyed upon for our blue colored wings, if we did not transform or adapt to our surroundings, we would be obsolete. It is for this reason that we elaborately modify and adorn our bodies so dramatically to fit in with the times.

The sculpture *Slip* was sewn together in a grid structure with rows of gossamer fabric, the general shape was decided on after playing with various arrangements. The shape, a large pod,
reminded me of plants and flowers in the process of seeding, as well as the human body. The large volume of fabric and diaphanous softness evokes the rococo dress practices of women where softness and frills became their main adornment technique on dress garments. Thinking on skin and suppleness, this sculpture reminds me of a person. Rough in silhouette and unformed, this abundance of fabric for me embodies soft supple flesh with references to the female body. Lacking a corset, bum roll or under clothes and dress, this object is yet to be transformed according to the dictates or standards of beauty. Like a cocoon, or flower bud yet to unravel, it contains only itself and no knowledge of prettiness or expectations of loveliness through body modification or dress standards. The shapelessness of the form mimics the beauty of things unaltered, wild and free. In addition to the sculpture, the installation is grounded by pink and white abaca paper combined with plexiglass flowers that lie underneath the hanging fabric as if it were a puddle that has accumulated. This was an aesthetic choice in order to give visual weight to the article.

Beauty through modification, adornment and supplementing are all aspects of dress and how we appear to others. An elaborate ritual in which we shape our flesh in the pursuit of desire and attraction. Botany of Desire, author and journalist Michael Pollan speaks about the role beauty and fitness play in ritualistic mating practices,

“Evolutionary biologists believe that in many creatures beauty is a reliable indicator of health, and therefore a perfectly sensible way to choose one mate over another. Gorgeous plumage, lustrous hair, symmetrical features are ‘certificates of health,’”8

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Beauty rules supreme, in the animal kingdom, the plant world, and the human purview. We groom ourselves in order to compete and impress. Symmetry, elaborate clothing, attractive colors, healthy and bountiful hair, clean glowing skin that is soft and available for touch. These are all important factors in human courtship.

Nature in the garden

Nonverbally, people and flowers have similar ways to attract. The way we smell, the colors we wear, and the swishing of fabric all compare to a waving floral petal. Seemingly enticed by nature, we in many ways choose to copy it in various aspects of life. Nothing is truer in historical costume practices. Nature to this day can mesmerize and captivate us and we have become its most dedicated lookalike.

The plant world is rife with similarities to fashion often found in color and silhouette of form. There are also similarities to the way humans and flowers attract attention and socialize. In the book *Botany of Desire*, author and journalist Michael Pollan examines the relationship between human and plant. Briefly he talks about the similarities between a garden rampant with flowers and a city,

“The flowering garden is a place you immediately sense is thick with information, thick as a metropolis, in fact. It’s an oddly sociable, public sort of place, in which species seem eager to give one another the time of day; they dress up, flirt, flit visit.”

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Both flowers and humans thrive in a social atmosphere, by calling attention to oneself as a flower might, and showing off or emphasizing your best assets, you are letting your admirer know you are available and ripe for the plucking. This exchange of sensorial information is integral to courtship.

Nature is both spellbindingly beautiful as well as viciously savage. The joy to look upon a flower is contrasted with the brutality of a stinging nettle or thorny rose. Many of the organic forms I am creating are both enticing and repelling. They are beautiful and a little bit ugly, meant to seduce the viewer but leave them ill at ease.

*Before Metamorphosis,* reminds me of the subtlety we find both in flowers and dress practices as well as the attention seeking that blooms and humans participate in. The delicacy of the color implies shyness, purity, like an undergarment or wedding veil. This color is not unknown to flowers, often the blossoms that lack the vibrant color to attract the eye, use other devices in order to gain attention. while the extravagant beading and abundance of fabric call for your eye, the use of scent in this piece was meant to mimic the methods of plants. This work was created thinking about enticement. It was my intention to seduce the viewer into wanting to have contact with it, I wanted to achieve this with the softness of the sewn fabric visually stimulating the desire of touch perhaps as a frothy undergarment might. This sculpture was created by cutting small pieces of sheer netted fabric and sewing it onto an understructure that was later formed into its round shape. Using the oil of a jasmine flower, I scented the inside of the fabric. Finally, I used the natural recesses between the fabric to sew in the pearlescent beading. This sculpture is mysterious in its identity. Calling out to the viewer for attention, it retains its secrecy. In the cavernous opening you wish to reach your hand into but are unsure if you might get bitten. This
object is obvious in its sensuality and beauty, but not in its identity. As its creator I imagine it sitting in the grass, like a creature you have just discovered and are unsure of. For me this piece implies the mystery of something not quite transformed into its final stages of beauty. While Its softness implies the delicacy of a flower petal, I imagine this sculpture as a fuzzy white caterpillar.

Flowers function much like we humans do; we play upon the desires of our chosen, with our body, clothes and scent we make promises of satisfaction and bliss. We do this for companionship, friendship, but most importantly for procreation. When done artfully and in essence productively, we as lovers and humans succeed in passing on our DNA.
The Monsters in the garden

Thinking on the garishness and brutality that we find both in nature and humanity, many of the sculptures were influenced by the ugliness found in the formulaic attempts made toward attractiveness. When these gesticulations of beauty and desire that we make become obvious and showy there is a tastelessness that arises. Bodies constricted so that it can mimic attractive forms found in nature but instead resembles something closer to a cartoon caricature. Flesh pulled and contorted in an effort to be youthful or desirable. Copious amounts of hair gel used to prevent wisps and to appear controlled and coifed. Things that lurk under the surface of beauty. With beauty comes revulsion. It is my desire to examine both the attractive and the repulsive.

In *Pull your Hair Out*, I combined a fabric sculpture with human hair. The form is roughly shaped into the form of a trunk hose canion as seen in fig. 2. The hair protrudes at irregular intervals and is gelled so extravagantly that it starts to appear greasy or wet. The pattern is a found material and is flocked velvet onto the cloth, creating a rich a textural experience that stimulates the desire for touch. The hair is sporadically rippling down the form as if patches of
hair had been pulled in frustration. The long pieces of hair also start to resemble insect legs, further eliciting feelings of repulsion in the viewer. This sculpture hangs in the gallery above the viewer, as if waiting for someone to walk underneath so that it might ensnare and consume them. In *The Shoe Don’t Dance*, I am playing with materials that can mimic flesh. Using expandable foam, I sprayed the inside of the shoe until large amounts erupted from the shoe. Using paint, I made the foam resemble flesh, purple in some areas to imply a bruising and swelling of skin. The eyelashes are placed as an adornment, but instead of beatification, it appears to infest the skin, implying something rotten is contained within the shoe. This eruption of flesh and infestation of eyelashes are contrasted with the bright and beautiful shoe. This piece simulates someone who was desperately forcing a shoe to fit, and in result their foot became contorted and infected.
Lastly the sculpture *Merkin* hangs from the wall in the gallery,

This sculpture was created by using the process of felting. I felted together patches of straw-colored wool as well as circular sections of dark brown doll hair. As they lay in separate pieces, they resemble sunflowers with their dark circular interior and yellow surrounding ring, as well as merkins which are pubic wigs that originated in the 1450’s to replace hair that was shaven for personal hygiene. These pieces were combined to create a sculpture that resembles a hairy creature of some unknown origin. As I contemplate this sculpture, I imagine it scurrying around

the garden in a desperate attempt to conceal itself from predators, for if I were in the garden, I would certainly be compelled to eradicate it.


**Scent**

Using scent that you might find in the garden; I am using the olfactory response to simulate intrigue and pleasure in the brain. I have tinctured various sculptures with orange blossom, jasmine, and rose. All these scents are both highly appealing to me and have a personal
connection to my past. The rose is a scent that most of America is trained to respond to, it opens its petals and calls to you, asking you to stop and smell. Often rose is considered an attractive smell and widely used in perfumeries and has historically been a scent that has lasted centuries in the public favor. Jasmine also is a highly perfumed blossom; it carries on the wind and has long been used in beatification processes for women. In Persia, women would hide the blossoms in their bras, allowing the scent to cling to their skin for their lovers. Lastly the scent of orange blossom hints at the beginning of spring and the sweet promise of lush fruit. Again, it is highly fragrant and calls to the passerby for attention. For me it recalls memories of orange trees in the back of my home and night walks in the neighborhood.

All these scents are not only stimuli of pleasure, but also elementally connect to the collective memory of humanity. As we were once so closely tied to the land and its signs and rewards. We were trained to recognize flowers and scents. They invoke a pleasure response in us that ties back into the times of hunter and gatherers. These scents were used in the sculptures not only to simulate the viewer interacting with a garden experience, but with perhaps the interaction of human to human.

In the Article, *The Sociology of Odors*, authors and academics Gale Largey, and David Watson write about the role pleasing scents play in attraction,

“Historically, perfuming has also been associated with the enhancement of one’s sexual attractiveness; and the belief that perfumes are erotic stimulants persists in most societies.”

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A powerfully strong scent is something you would expect to encounter in both the garden as well as a crowded ballroom. A pleasing scent meant that you could bring someone close as a flower does to a bee or a human to spread its pollen. In the role of seduction odors play an important role. The unwashed meant the unkempt, while the smart courter chooses to enhance their attractiveness with the use of pleasing scent enhancers. This use of scent was integral in the dance of courtship, giving the ability to hypnotize and effectively enthrall your partner.

**Touch: Paper, Fabric and Fiber**

I started working with textiles when younger, I was always attracted to fabric stores, I loved going into the fabric store. Seeing all the different patterns and material, it felt like a playground with an endless amount of opportunities. I learned a little bit of sewing when I was younger, my parents buying a sewing machine when I expressed interest and taking a few basic rudimentary classes. This fell by the wayside when I grew up, gravitating more to painting and drawing. Nonetheless the love of fabrics remained. I would often go to the fabric store and pick up a bolt of fabric and purchase it for its materiality, seduced by its silkiness or opalescence.

Working with fabric was also a part of my earlier body of work. Using clothes to print monotypes the physical properties of the fabric were extremely important. What material received ink, what repelled it. How does one fabric communicate materiality better than others? Thinking about clothes and seduction, fabric choice became a language. What does it look like, what is the visual texture it holds? Does it entice the viewer to touch it? Does the fabric look like
it would feel good on your skin? I often let the material choose me. I usually shop for fabric knowing what color I want, and then choose the fabric for its softness, silkiness, or pearlescence.

Couture sewing techniques and methods of fabric manipulation were used in the majority of the fiber sculptures: the process of smocking, gathering, pleating and creation of textiles through sewing. Using these techniques isolated from wearable garments enables me to create new and unusual shapes and forms. Creating textiles with visual texture and manipulating this fabric has become the foundation of the work. Referencing several books, has helped me to learn these techniques and alter them to fit my purposes. For example, some of the books used in my material research include, *Laser Cutting for Fashion and Textiles* by Laura Berens Baker, *Design on Fabrics* by Mede Parker Johnson and Glen Kaufman, *The Art of Manipulating Fabric* by Colette Wolf, and *The Art of Couture Sewing* by Zoya Nudelman.

The fabric manipulation techniques used are one of the key components to the craft included in these sculptures. For instance, smocking techniques have been utilized both in *Coveted* as well as *Snake in the Grass*. For the former I used a smocking machine, making fairly uniform intervals between the threads to create the rucking affect. For the latter I used a technique called honeycomb smocking, where the gathering stiches is in an alternating pattern that creates a diamond affect. Smocking was used historically in the place of elastic, where clothing was meant to gather but have some elasticity, smocking was the technique used to create ‘give’ in certain areas of clothing, From utilitarian to highly decorative, smocking was a common part to most dress practices in place of tailoring and was prevalent in the 18th and 19th century. These manipulations serve to create a texture that invokes the senses of touch, but also creates both a 2D and 3D pattern.
In *Snake in the Grass* both the materiality and the fabric manipulation come to center stage. The fabric was chosen because of its mint color and ties to the rococo period. The silk was important for its illustrious quality. Shiny and glimmering among the imaginary grass. While in ‘coveted’ the fiber was chosen for its skin like quality, the iridescence of the silky green fabric was important to mimic reflective scales, each fabric was an important choice for its respective pieces.

![Image 11. Installation shot. 2020.](image)

In addition to the fiber sculptures, I have been making paper by pouring fiber onto large papermaking moulds. I use abaca, which is a species of banana commonly found in the Philippines. Abaca is commonly used by paper artisans and considered to be a highly flexible medium. It readily changes its appearance based on how long it is beaten. I have been dying
abaca various colors, including pink and green and using the fiber in large and small portions as intermediaries between pedestal and object or object and floor. These pieces of paper either have inclusions of laser cut fabric flowers, hair, or are just thin colored abaca paper. The thinness of the paper mimics fabric in some respects, while in turn transforming themselves into surfaces that might imitate moss, or some queer substance that one might not want to touch in fear of it clinging to your fingertips.

In *Mound Ponds*, the imaginary grass is also made of abaca. I chose to use abaca to surround the mirrored laser cut plexiglass to simulate a reflective pond and mound of grass. Allowing the paper to be rough and largely unbeaten, the texture helps to transition plexiglass to floor, manufactured surface to something more organic. The abaca ‘grass’ was also used around the pedestals, to mimic the visual of columns left in the garden. The *Mound Ponds* were created as another facilitator to both entice the viewer and encourage them to walk around the gallery and make the installation feel truly like a garden with flowers surrounding you and a pond of water to stop at and briefly catch your reflection in. They were created by etching images of ripples into blue mirrored plexiglass. Several different ripple designs were created in various shapes, to create cohesiveness and variety.
Printmaking: Pattern and Multiples

Coming from a printmaking background, my process often involves some aspect of print. My love of pattern and textile has brought me back to hand printing and screen-printing textile designs. Previously my work involved monotyping clothing articles as a record and investigation into personhood, identity, color and pattern. Various aspects of my show are both literal applications of print as displayed in the surface design of fabric textiles as well as print-minded installation of the multiple as seen by artists such as John Hancock, Marilee Salvatore, and Leslie Friedman. This installation style directly influenced how I displayed my *Human Flowers*. 

For my fiber sculptures the first step is creating the textile. For some of these pieces this involves a printed pattern. The patterns are created by using Jaipur block printmaking methods; these blocks were used with mordants and resists for stamping to create patterns on textiles. These blocks contain repeating patterns and are carved into a wood matrix and then hand printed onto textiles. Using this historical printmaking technique has both connected me to one of the processes that would have been used in the clothing that I am referencing, as well as taught me new processes to a medium I am already very familiar with. These Jaipur textiles made their way into the European markets in the 1700s.

First you take the cloth and stretch it to a batting board, once stretched you can either screen print or relief print a pattern. For the majority of my textiles I have been using the relief process, physically pressing a piece of wood with a carved pattern onto the fabric.

The patterns that I am printing are floral patterns, that make reference to the patterns used historically in both men and women’s garments. The patterns are also visual clues to the implied nature in each of the sculptures. For me they represent a calling card, where we circle back to flowers and linking the sculptures back to procreation, for me these patterns become unifying threads in the visual vocabulary of the show as a collection of work. For instance, in *Snake in the Grass*, I print a tulip pattern in a gradual color transition. Not only does the pattern serve to reference snake scales, but the pattern of tulips creates a link to flowers that may be unapparent to viewers at first glance.

My plexiglass pieces could also function as prints, using a digital process where I transfer a drawing to the computer using scans, I then use a Universal laser machine to etch and cut the drawing into the frosted plexiglass. These flowers could easily be transitioned into an etching or relief print. Instead I chose to use this process to create objects that can install together in then various iterations. I am essentially making multiples and hanging them as I might do a print. A 2-d installation of a drawing transferred to plexiglass. While the plexiglass replaces the paper, I do see these Human Flowers as prints created through the use of technology. Using Plexiglass enabled me to create an imaginary garden, using various soft and vibrant hues of colored plastic to attract the eye. By collaging various illustrations from fashion plates, as well as drawing in highly sexualized areas of the human body, legs, butt, breasts, and genitals I created illustrations of “human flowers”.

These drawings are made by merging together both species sexual call to reproduction, the flowers using their petals and the humans their clothing or lack thereof. I start by finding illustrations of overly designed and audacious clothing. I then isolate these clothing articles and through photoshop alter them to resemble petals, they are then collaged around drawings of nude figures, where the genitals are on display, effectively making a human flower. These illustrations are making references to the flowers own reproductive systems, i.e. the pistil and stamen.

The images are drawn together and scanned and put through several processes until they are then etched into plastic and cut out into shapes. This process uses the laser. Working with technology has been important in that it enabled to quickly make multiples in varying size. Etching my drawing into the material and then cutting it free from the matrix.
The flower cutouts are dotted around the gallery to imitate a patch of flowers, as if to entice bees; and to imitate a gathering of humans at a party enticing someone to join them. My point was to draw the connection of sexual imperative of reproduction that both flowers and humans partake in. The flowers also serve as a way to draw the viewer around the gallery, while maintaining a cohesive thread that the viewer starts to recognize.

**Color and Desire**

Using color was important for this body of work. Being inspired by western clothing traditions, specifically the Rocco. I used soft and bright pastel colors common to décor and dress practices of the time. It was also my intention to elicit the feelings of desire and sensuality, relating work to that of the body, thus using soft pink, taupe, as well as uses of leather to reference flesh.

![Image 15. Installation shot 2. 2020.](image-url)
Thinking about relating nature to the historical clothing, flowers also immediately jump to mind, thus many aspects of the show are using jewel tones commonly found in flowers that in turn help flora and fauna attract attention.

In the book *Botany of Desire*, Author and avid gardener Michael Pollan speaks to the use of pigmenting in the natural world, “The petal, where beauty’s first principle—contrast with its surroundings appears, a feat accomplished with color”.¹¹ Color serves as a way for the blooms to stand out from its surroundings, whether in a field of grass or among a sea of other flowers, color is used to differentiate and stand out from would-be competitors.

I intentionally chose bright and vibrant colors to grab the viewers’ attention like a flower might out in the landscape. Juxtaposed against these bright vivacious colors are moment of softness and rest. Choosing colors that embody the atmosphere of quiet as well as the pinkness of delicate and intimate flesh.

![Image 16. Human Flowers. 2020.](image)

Both flowers and humans use color to attract attention. As an example of these vivacious colors used in the work are my plexiglass cut designs. They serve to grab the eye and simulate the experience of a garden in bloom, or a party with too many bodies. Continuing off the wall, *Snake in the Grass*, and the *Mound Ponds* are other examples of these vibrant and rich colors. In contrast to these jewel tones and pastels, are the uncanny sculptures containing soft fleshy colors, like *Coveted* and *Before Metamorphosis*. While the soft pinks and pale white help to tie in the gentle colors of a rose, these sculptures help to solidify the allusion to flesh and human bodies.

These hybrid objects speak to the artificial vs natural. The plastic begins to talk about the elaborate reproduction of nature that humans partake in. We use all these tools of adornment, wigs, fake nails, false eyelashes in order to beautify ourselves. The artificiality of these objects reflects that mimicking of the natural that often falls short of true beauty. With these colors I am artificially simulating a garden, far from the real thing, it is all an imitation of nature. Much like how humans choose to adorn themselves in imitation and artificiality, I believe these element highlights that relationship.

**Conclusion**

Thinking on nature, I have always appreciated the beauty of both the uncultivated wild, as much as a highly designed garden. For me the natural world is both beautiful and haunting, enticing and repulsive. As a young girl, my father kept a garden and I would often spend time with him running around barefoot. Though I never inherited his green thumb, I always carried a deep appreciation and wonder for cultivated and uncultivated nature. When we think about beauty in the wild and the garden, most of its beauty is tied to breeding rituals. The glorious bloom of a
flower, the wildly colorful plumes of birds. Attractiveness means success, the ability to pass on your genetic material.

My goal was to examine beauty and ugliness, the desperate attempt humankind makes at becoming desirable. Through research and exploration of materials my perspective has changed intensely. Through this process I have learned that I hold some contempt for beauty while still ever remaining in its thrall, my relationship with beauty being complicated and complex since childhood. I want my viewers to experience this same feeling, the recognition of beauty and the repulsion as well. I think often it is easy to forget how constructed beauty is, and I would like my viewer to realize this through viewing and interacting with this show.

By creating uncanny sculptures inspired by nature, historical body modification, and couture sewing, it was my hope to combine these things in a beautifully atrocious body of work that seduces and intrigues the viewer. These hybrid objects invoke historical sewing practices like smocking, as well as surface designs of textiles in the Jaipur tradition. The repetition of pattern and form creates visual fluidity while the oddness and amalgamation of objects used for adornment creates eerie out of place creatures.

For me the future of the work will continue pushing the limits of modification and embellishment. I want to create garish and obtuse sculptures that are ludicrous, beautiful, and repellent. I can only imagine my work gravitating further towards these areas of material exploration.
Bibliography


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Vita

Clare Samani is an artist that specializes in printmaking, sculpture, and installation. She has a BFA in Printmaking from California State Long Beach and is a current MFA candidate at Louisiana State University with hopes of receiving her Masters degree in August 2020. Her work has been exhibited nationally. With highlights including shows in California, North Carolina, Colorado, Minnesota, and Missouri. Political and social themes like identity, gender, and assimilation through fashion pervade Samani’s work