



ITERATION ONE

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A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts in Textiles in the Department of Textiles of the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island.

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To my Parents



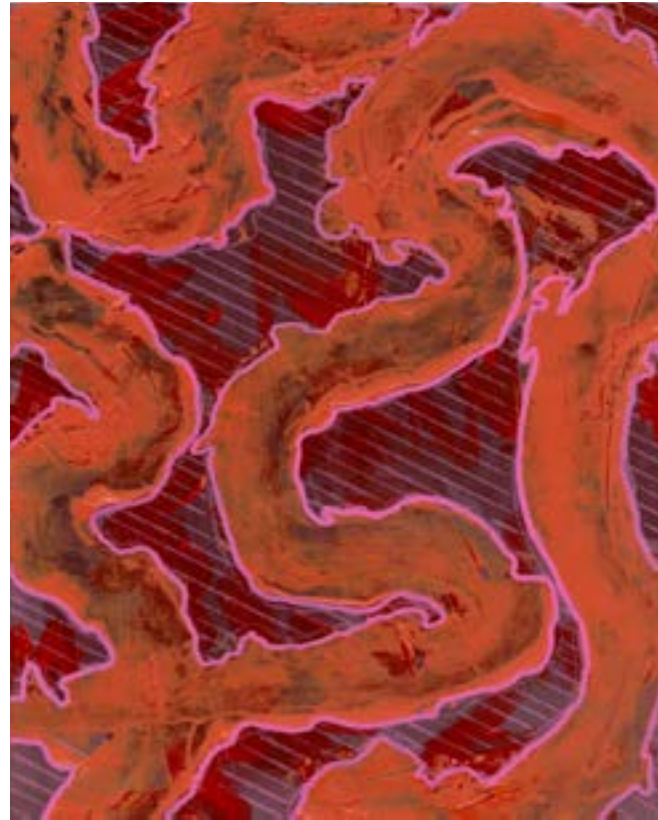
CONTENTS

THOUGHTS ON LUXURY	7
BUILDING INSTINCT	9
OPERATING WITH PURPOSE	17
EMBRACING VERSATILITY	26
HONORING MATERIALITY	31
WORKS CITED	49
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	51



THOUGHTS ON LUXURY

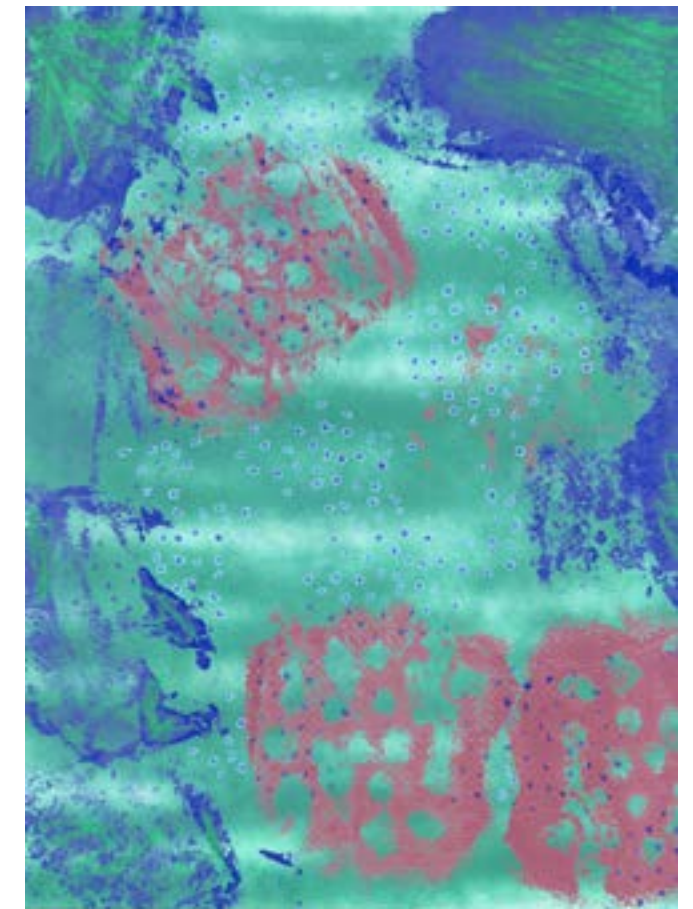
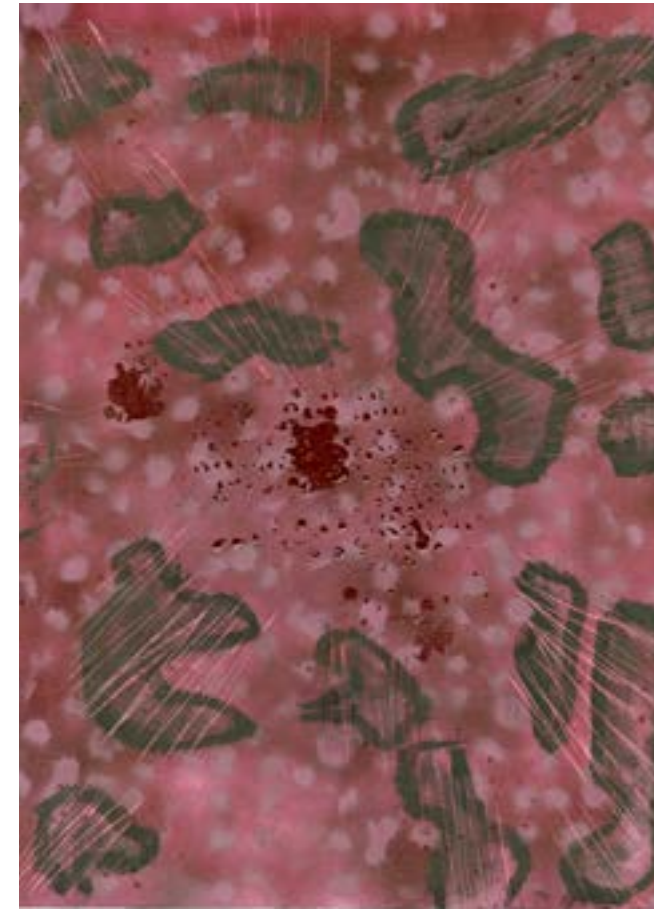
In the fashion world, companies aim to classify their products as luxury items. In the age of social media, companies have attempted to aggrandize their offerings through collaborations with famous artists, endorsements by celebrities, and even the appointment of pop stars as directors of the biggest fashion houses in the world, as if this “fame-by-association” can magically improve the clothing. Given all of these machinations, I can’t help but question what luxury actually means when you strip away marketing and if this status can be given or taken away. If a couture silk dress gets irreparably stained or ripped, is it still luxury? Is an old band T-shirt found at a thrift store suddenly a luxury item if a collector is willing to pay an exorbitant price for it? In this collection, I play with these ideas of luxury through various materials and processes as a form of reflection. You will notice rips and stains, the reworking of worn-out denim, and intricate handwork with details that were obsessed over. Some have been meticulously planned while others may have resulted from happy accidents, but I hope that in each of the pieces you might see the care, the joy, and even the frustration that went into them.



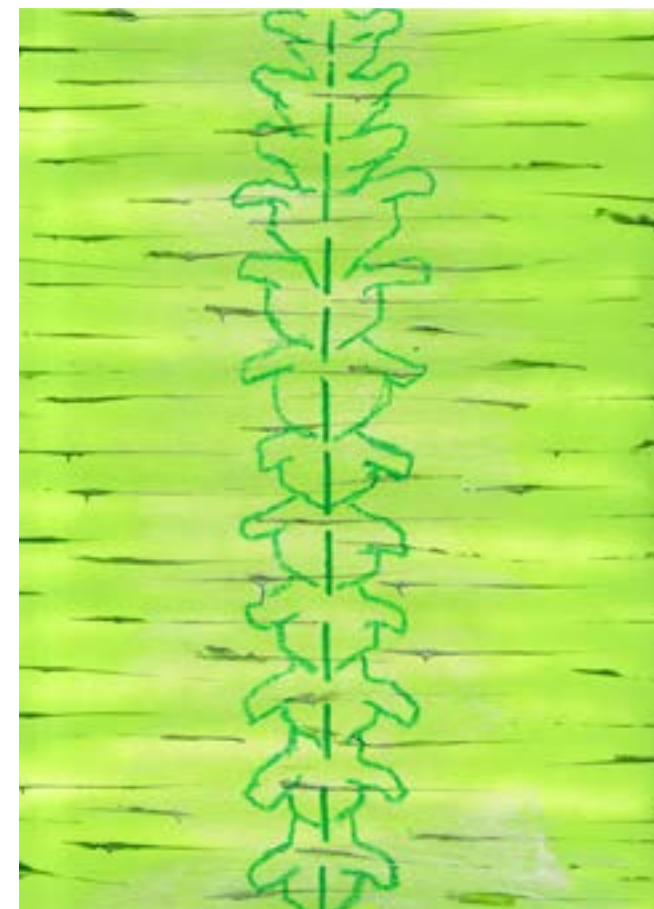
BUILDING INSTINCT



When designing a clothing collection, a common starting point is to compile reference imagery from a variety of sources such as movies, magazine clippings, or personal photographs. Having these references can enhance the conceptual clarity of an overarching theme or can be revisited as a point of reference in a moment of confusion. In an effort to be more intentional with my choice of imagery, I started by creating a series of paintings that would serve as a source of inspiration.



For this process of painting source imagery, I paid special attention to the choice of medium and intuitive use of color and mark making. I used spray paint, acrylic, gouache, pastel, colored pencil, marker, and pen with the aim of creating variety within each painting. This proved to be a worthwhile exercise, as demonstrated by the translation of these paintings into knitted fabrics.

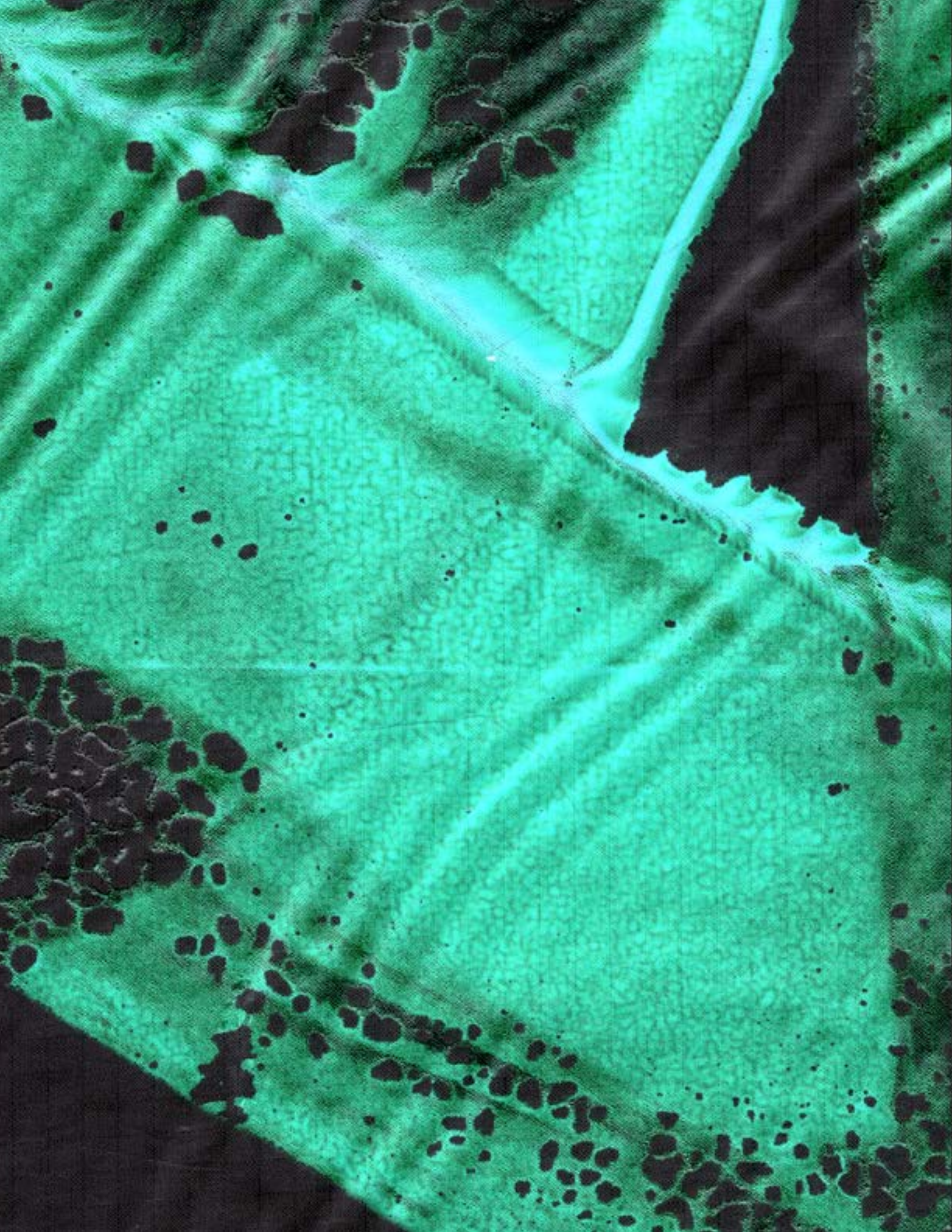




Knit sample based on painting. Wool, monofilament, rayon.



Knit sample based on painting. Merino wool, rayon.



OPERATING WITH PURPOSE

My interest in textiles and clothing stemmed from years of working with hard goods on construction sites, originally as a laborer, then as an apprentice, and eventually as a carpenter, welder and metal fabricator. Construction sites can at times be a hectic convergence of rugged materials, elegant craftsmanship, and eclectic personalities that come together with the common goal of creating functional beauty. Growing up working in such environments has fostered an appreciation for craft and materials that I bring to each project. In textiles, I find myself drawn to uncommon materials and techniques that can bring new personality to a piece of clothing. In my years in construction, I saw how unexpected materials could do this for a home. In architecture, Corbusier showed us this with concrete, Kundig with Corten steel.

The first construction site I worked on was substantial in scale, well-designed, and had a client that spared no expense towards making the project perfect. This meant that at any given time there were upwards of forty or fifty skilled tradesmen working in different areas of the home. Some installed custom wire brushed wood paneling while others installed lighting control systems, or meticulously placed handmade tiles one by one to ensure perfect spacing. I collected trash, swept floors, and hauled material around the site. As the newest and youngest member of the crew by far, my place at the bottom of the food chain was clear but witnessing masters of craft in action was an invaluable experience.

Navigating a job site is tricky if you don't know what you're doing. There are hazards everywhere from voids in the floor to loose wire suspended from ceilings and by the nature of construction, the obstacles are always changing. I won't even get into navigating coworkers. This environment taught me what I find to be an incredibly important life lesson and one that I bring to my work in textiles: operating with purpose.

Luxury craftsmanship is a result of focused time and experience. It takes patience and personal investment to create something beautiful and unique. A true master of craft knows how to work efficiently. I subscribe to the idea that in order to master something you have to be willing to fail at it, and while I wouldn't consider myself anything near a master craftsman, one lesson I learned in construction was how to fail efficiently.

When I get inspired by an idea for a new piece, I envision the process of making as navigating through obstacles by operating with purpose. Part of operating with purpose involves anticipating failures. To be able to foresee where things will go wrong, it is essential to prototype. Prototyping allows me to fail efficiently and make more purposeful adjustments to improve the final product.

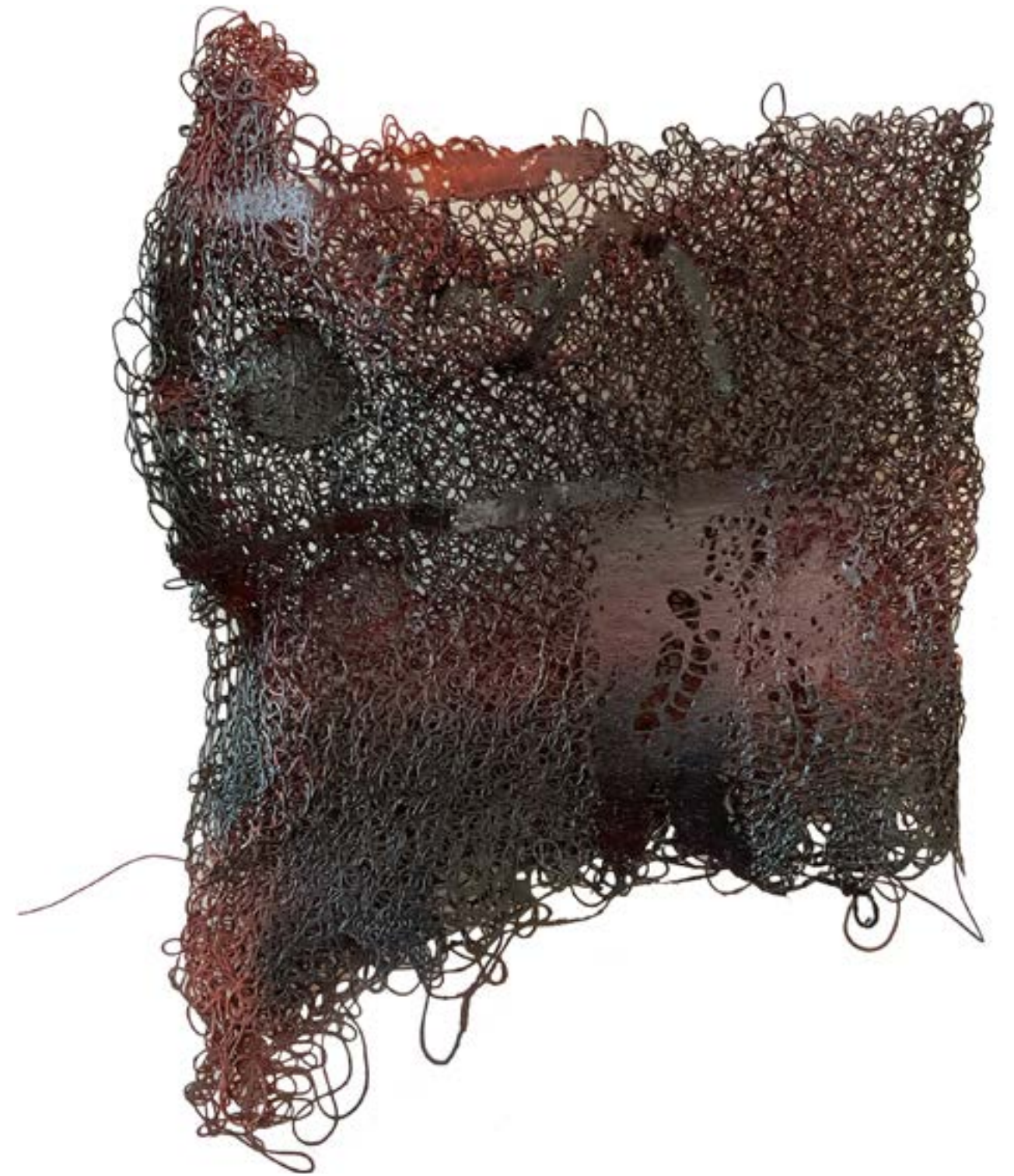
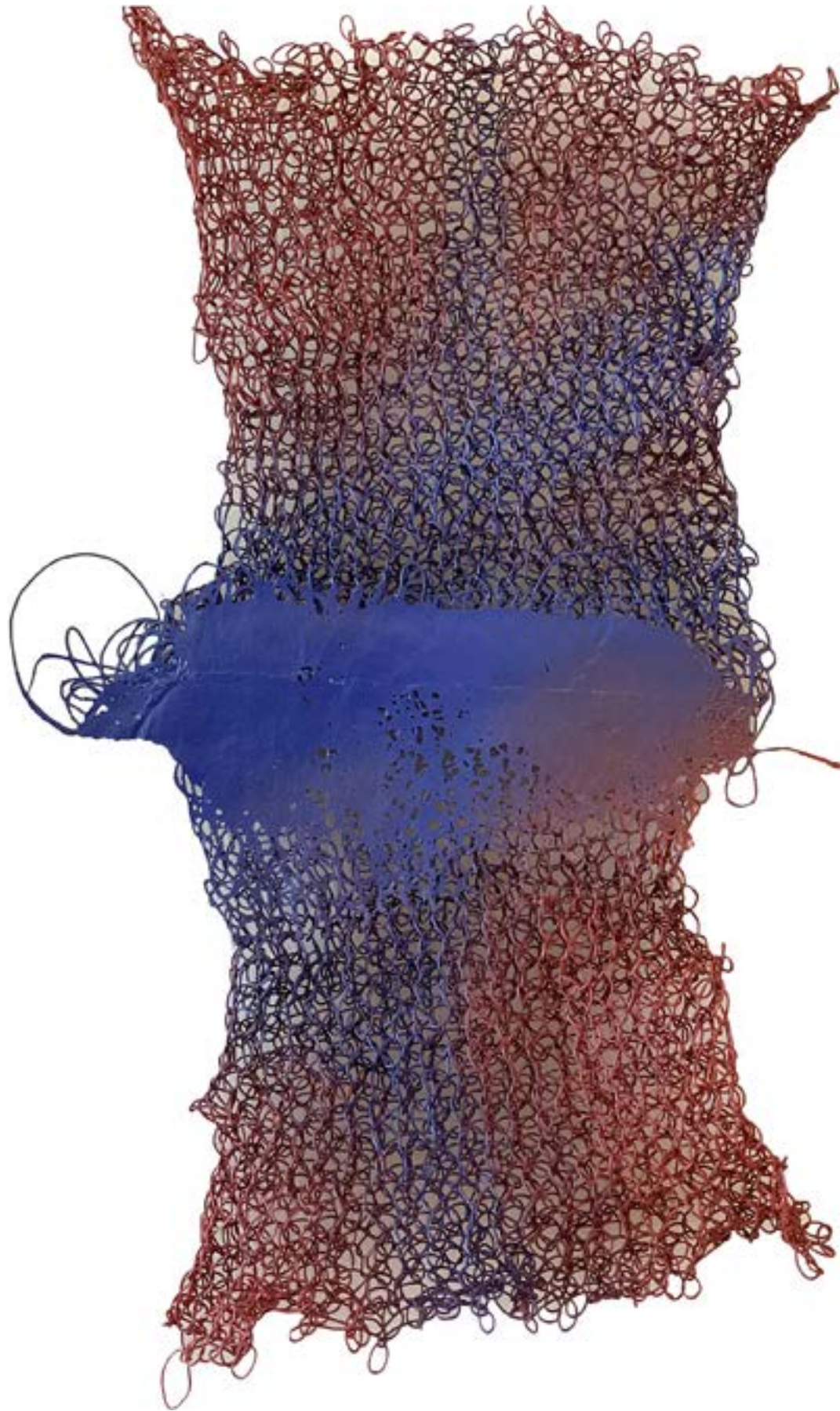




Laser engraved denim, testing to find proper power settings.



Knit sample of same design, testing yarn strength, colors and tension.



Samples testing melting properties of yarn and ability to accept spray paint.



Knit samples testing color, gauge and texture. Various yarns.

EMBRACING VERSATILITY

Many are familiar with the saying, “A jack of all trades is a master of none.” I’ve often heard this as a cautionary tale to discourage people from spreading themselves too thin or from pivoting between specializations. Far fewer, however, reference the full saying: “A jack of all trades is a master of none, but oftentimes better than a master of one.”

Within the worlds of art and design, I find myself drawn to works by those not afraid to switch between drastically different mediums. One of my favorite examples of this is the work of artist Sterling Ruby. It spans everything from ceramics to collage to textiles to clothing. To me, Ruby’s work demonstrates a mastery in mixed media. He often applies techniques used commonly in one medium to other seemingly unrelated media to create original work that presents something unfamiliar to the viewer. One example of this is his clothing line, S.R. Studio L.A., which he started when he wanted to make use of excess canvas from his paintings.

In my own practice, I consider the ability to switch between media to be invaluable. This philosophy is demonstrated in “Look 1” where a knitted top was assembled by melting panels together, rather than by knitting or sewing and in “Look 2” where pants were made of pre-existing jeans rather than pristine denim fabric.







HONORING MATERIALITY

Materiality has always been at the center of my design process, regardless of the medium I choose to work with. Reflecting on this, I wanted to research designers and artists who worked with media outside my realm of familiarity so as to gain a new perspective on how they approached different materials. One of the artists I discovered who ended up being pivotal to my research was JB Blunk.

JB Blunk was originally trained as a ceramicist and later incorporated other materials into his practice, including wood, stone and metal. His work existed at the intersection of sculpture and furniture and was inspired by natural settings around him, where he sourced many of his materials. He was influenced by Japanese design which he discovered during a trip to Japan in the 1950s. Once there, he worked with Isamu Noguchi, who became his close friend and mentor.

On close observation, the similarities between the two artists' work is evident. The bodies of work both display skilled craftsmanship and a profound respect for the materials used. Blunk was said to have looked at his materials with a "sense of honor" and though many of the materials he chose were simply what was locally available to him, he still gave each piece authentic consideration.

When I look at his work, what strikes me immediately is his value addition, and careful consideration of the inherent qualities of the materials. In other words, Blunk manipulates the materials to make them visually exciting without taking away their inherent properties; he lets wood be wood and stone be stone without trying to turn them into something they're not.





In his 1898 essay, *Building Materials*, Viennese architect, Adolf Loos, states: “The artist has only one ambition: to master his material in such a way that his work is independent of the value of the raw material.” Loos tackles a variety of issues regarding craft during the period, including challenging the idea of a material hierarchy. To him, an artist or craftsman should ignore perceived material value in favor of a mastery of their craft.

Loos cautions that if a piece becomes more about the material than craftsmanship, its value lies in quantity instead of quality. Since quantity is more obvious to an untrained eye and isn’t as prone to mistakes as craft is, he believes that craft deserves greater respect from a viewer. In the fashion world, it’s all too common to see marketing tactics that deceive based on material, for example in “mohair” sweaters which in reality consist of 70% acrylic yarns. This tactic is accepted by the Federal Trade Commission, which states that “fibers don’t need to be listed in descending order of predominance.”

Loos also proposes that a craftsman should commit to one medium without trying to use it to mimic others. He believes that in doing so, the cheapening of the craft as a whole becomes inevitable over time. This, while being an interesting point of view, is one I ultimately reject.

The philosophies of both JB Blunk and Adolf Loos are valuable perspectives through which I think about my own work. In terms of textiles, much of my work revolves around knit, a medium where material choice is the cornerstone of a successful piece. When choosing a yarn to knit with, the fiber content, stretch, color, strength, gauge and knit structure all demand consideration.

It can often be tempting to select a yarn that the knitter gravitates towards, then retroactively try to fit it into a project. This can give rise to technical challenges which in turn prevent the designer from achieving the desired results. For instance, I have on occasion been drawn towards a thick, soft cashmere when really what I should be using for the chosen structure is a thinner synthetic yarn with a smoother texture and higher strength.

It's possible that Loos would look at this and question why cashmere is put on a pedestal, or that Blunk would opt to go for the most available yarn and adjust the knit to fit around it instead. I find value in both of these points of view, and they have each guided my decision-making process at different points in the thesis process.

In the spirit of Blunk's philosophy, all of the pants, trousers and shorts in this collection consist of either waste or deadstock fabrics sourced locally. With Loos' ideas in mind, the collection was made with great attention to detail in an effort to highlight the craft of knitting in fashion.

This body of work demonstrates my definition of luxury. It refuses to compromise in three specific areas: passion for the craft, consideration of material and effort in execution. With these three elements present, I believe that luxury can exist in an unadulterated state.





LOOK 1

Manually knitted top assembled by melting panels together and finished with spray paint, displayed over a long sleeve navy dyed shirt.

Pants fashioned from waste fabric without side seams, finished by applying liquid rubber to hems while upside down.



LOOK 2

Sweater industrially knitted with stitch structures that enhance texture. Finished with manually knitted trims.

Pants consisting of patchworked thrifted denim, laser engraved in separate panels before assembly.



LOOK 3

Industrially knitted shaped vest featuring plating with an alternating knit and perl structure.

Shorts in deadstock suiting fabric featuring raw hem.



LOOK 4

Hoodie industrially knitted in merino wool.

Pants with deadstock fabric, hand dyed and patterned with partial pleats.



LOOK 5

Raglan sweater industrially knitted featuring a plated rib. Finished with manually knitted trims.

Construction pants sewn out of deadstock wool suiting fabric.

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