

*(RE)CONTEXTUALISED
CHATELAINE*

Gabrielle

Sharkey

Curatorial work by Audrey Merton

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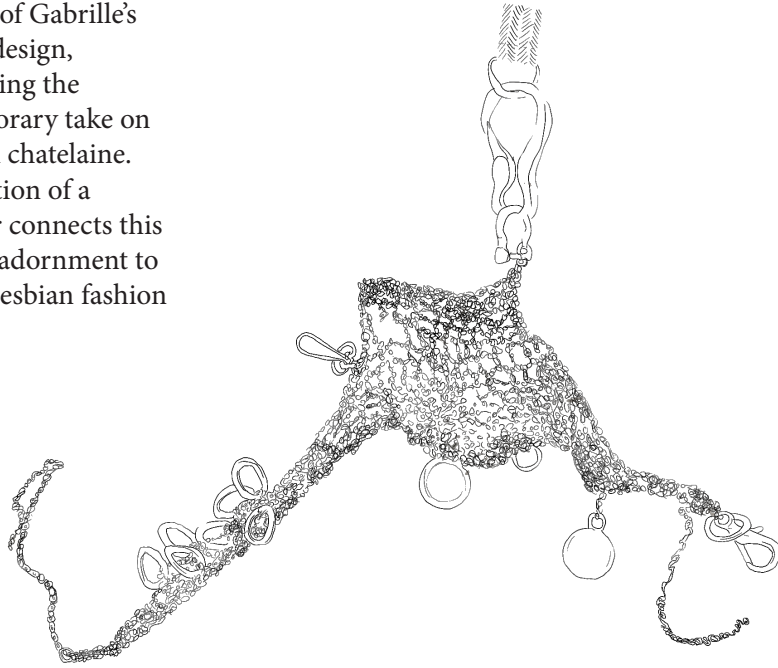
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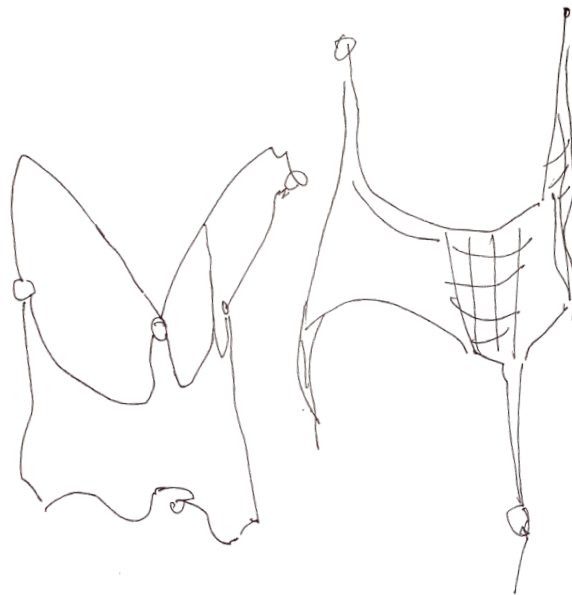
*Gabrielle and I wish to acknowledge the Traditional
Custodians of the land, rivers and waterways on which we
have the privilege to create.*

*We extend our respect to the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung
people of the Kulin nations. This land is stolen land and
was never ceded.*

A sketch of Gabrielle's original design, highlighting the contemporary take on historical chatelaine. The addition of a carabiner connects this women's adornment to modern lesbian fashion



Sketches of mine from our production discussions, realising the 'original' form of the final vest prototype, as to be worn on the body.



CHATELAINE

Chatelaine, named from the french *châtelaine* (a woman in charge of the house), is a description of the practical 'key chain' worn on one's skirt in the mid-19th century. Typically with a lace-like metal clasp chained to multiple useful items, such as thimbles, scissors, coin purses and so on. A fashionable jewellery accessory in its fine detailing and adaptable design choices, yet practical and pragmatic in its uses. In Gabrielle's research for this design process, she highlighted the link that this vintage accessory has to the modern day use of the carabiner by the lesbian community, as an echo of this past dichotomy and a contemporary calling card. These links to sexuality and gender allow for a marked 'identification with clothing that [enables] mutual recognition and encounters.'¹ Through her research of this object she created a body of work that we were able to expand on through a collaborative curatorial process.

¹ Auslander, Leora. "Deploying Material Culture to Write the History of Gender and Sexuality: The Example of Clothing and Textiles." *Clio. Women, Gender, History*, no. 40 (2014): 157-78.





GS: 'The [...] jewellery gives an emotive and interactive effect, the chain trickling with the wearer's movements.'

The conception of this project was based on research into 'the object' – the art-object, the sculptural object, the icon (as a religious and worshipped 'altar') – and what it could mean to subvert the gallery paradigm by providing the viewer with only one artwork to perceive. I began by choosing my first object. I wanted a textural form, one that had ties to interdisciplinary practices and as such was outside the typical realm of what we consider fine art to be. My curatorial approach was open and honest, relying on the connections I could make with Gabrielle, her practice, and the context of the object.

Conceptual hang of the piece (right) in a casual metal environment – in this case a building site. How does the object develop in situ and unworn?

Situating the piece in nature, freeform installation with small amounts on drapery, focusing on camouflaged aspects.



Throughout this project we discussed how Gabrielle came to create this piece. She shared that the piece was hand knitted, using a variety of chain and needle sizes. Gabrielle chose this variety in size and shape so as to achieve the ‘spider web’ effect within the object’s negative space. The materiality of the object meant that it was created as one whole, rather than individual patterned panels. Once she was happy with the shape of the object she took it to her studio space, shared with Raphy of *Morph Studios*, a local silverworker. In collaboration, he created an adaptable chain to be used as the sleeves of the vest. They worked to design a number of clasps for the object to allow for adaptations to its shape, hang and functionality.

This kind of collaboration calls to the corporeality and practice of fashion, specifically in this relationship with a traditional craft medium such as silverwork. The object retains the practicality of fashion, with the reference of luxury that chatelaine and other adornments had. By using this luxurious and glam material for the final vest creation, Gabrielle links queer ontologies with fashion, combining chainmail with fishnet, adornment with practicality and embodying queer culture.

GS: [...] jewellery and the way that it’s precious and adored due to its permanence, as opposed to clothing which we have much more fleeting relationships with.’

Image taken at MADA Monash, Caulfield Campus. Experimenting with plinth drapery and adjusting to a rectangular object typically seen in a gallery space.

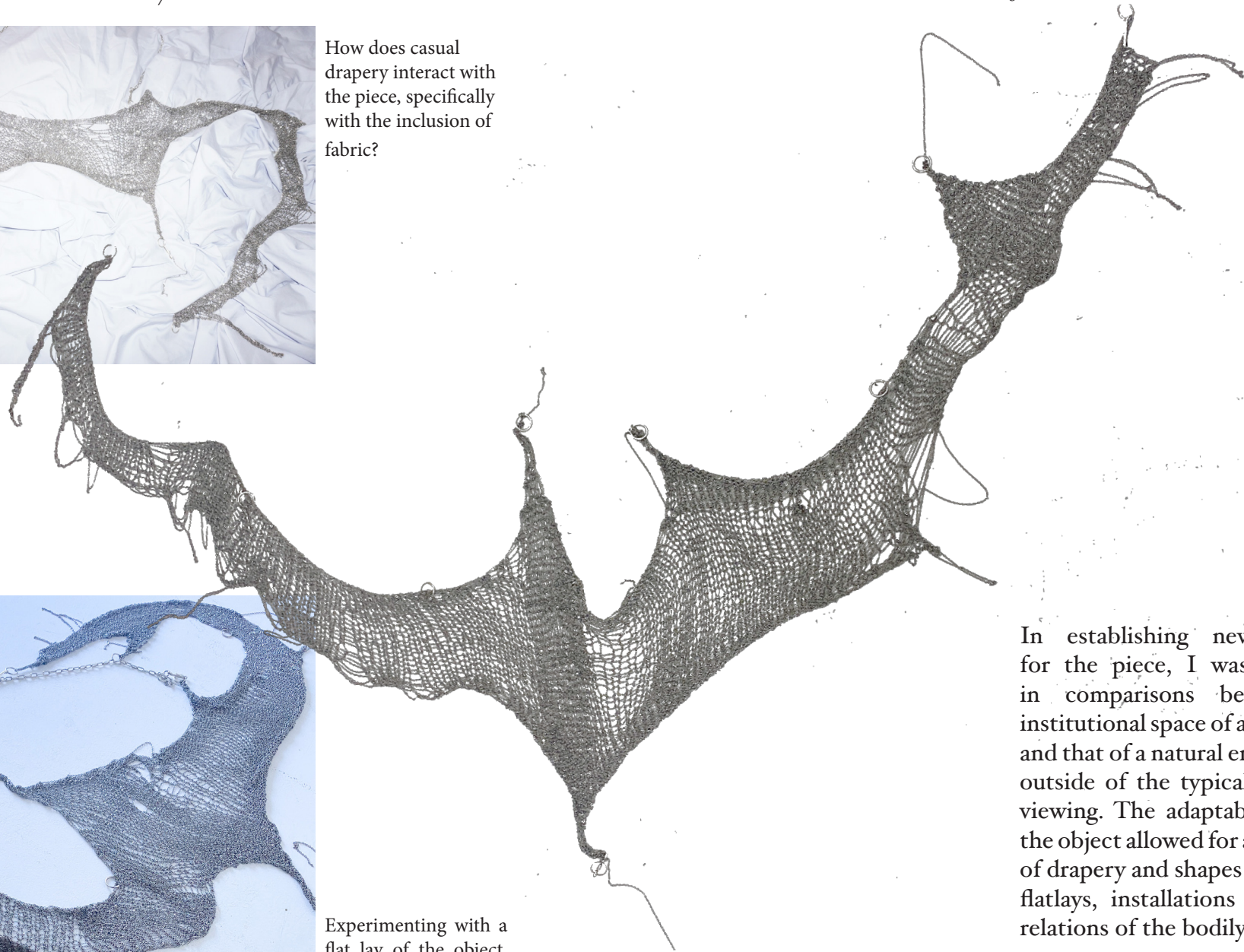


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How does casual drapery interact with the piece, specifically with the inclusion of fabric?

8



In establishing new contexts for the piece, I was interested in comparisons between the institutional space of an art gallery and that of a natural environment, outside of the typical site of art viewing. The adaptable shape of the object allowed for a wide range of drapery and shapes – intriguing flatlays, installations and spatial relations of the bodily form.



Experimenting with a flat lay of the object. How does the shape change? How does drapery over a corner or abrupt level change develop the context?

GS: 'Combining jewellery and clothing gives rise to amplified drape and accentuation upon the body.'



By signifying a new contextual relationship for this object, I was able to interrogate how site and environment can influence our understanding of sculptural forms. In draping the object over a plinth, one could see the configuration and adaptable nature of the piece. This kind of drapery, even if the object itself is not worn, is a reminder of the emphasis placed on our own bodies in a white cube gallery¹. Removal of context within these archetypal spaces sometimes reduces our understanding of art as connected throughout disciplines and cultural affinity.

This curatorial context allowed for a reductionist understanding of the bodily reflection of object and viewer. This relationship subjectifies our understanding of the influence fashion has on our own perception of self. By ‘recreating the absent body’² through exhibitivite techniques I was able to interrogate the relationship between fashion and art. Sculptural forms, no matter the discipline, recreate our own knowledge of the body as a three dimensional object – one that can interact with others. These objects become bodily forms.

1 See: O’Doherty, Brian. *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. Expanded ed., 1st University of California Press ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

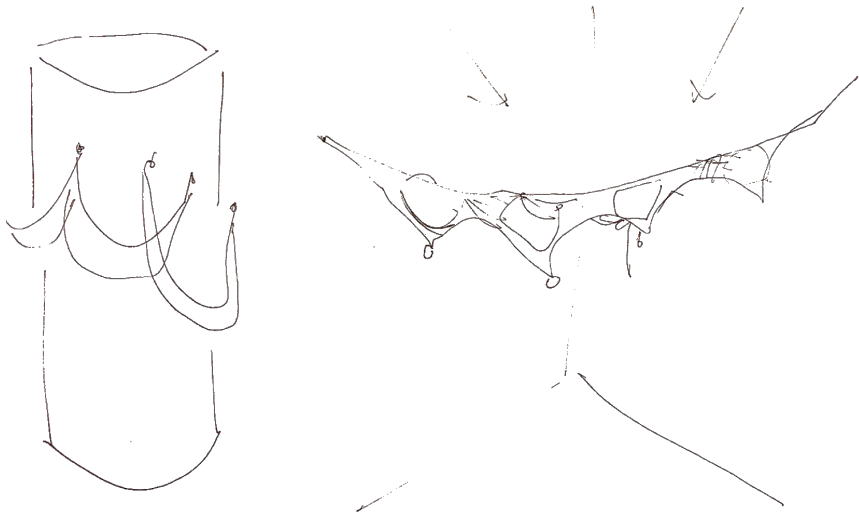
2 Pecorari, Marco. 2014. ‘Beyond Garments: Reorienting the Practice and Discourse of Fashion Curating.’ *Fashion Curating: Critical Practice in the Museum and Beyond*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

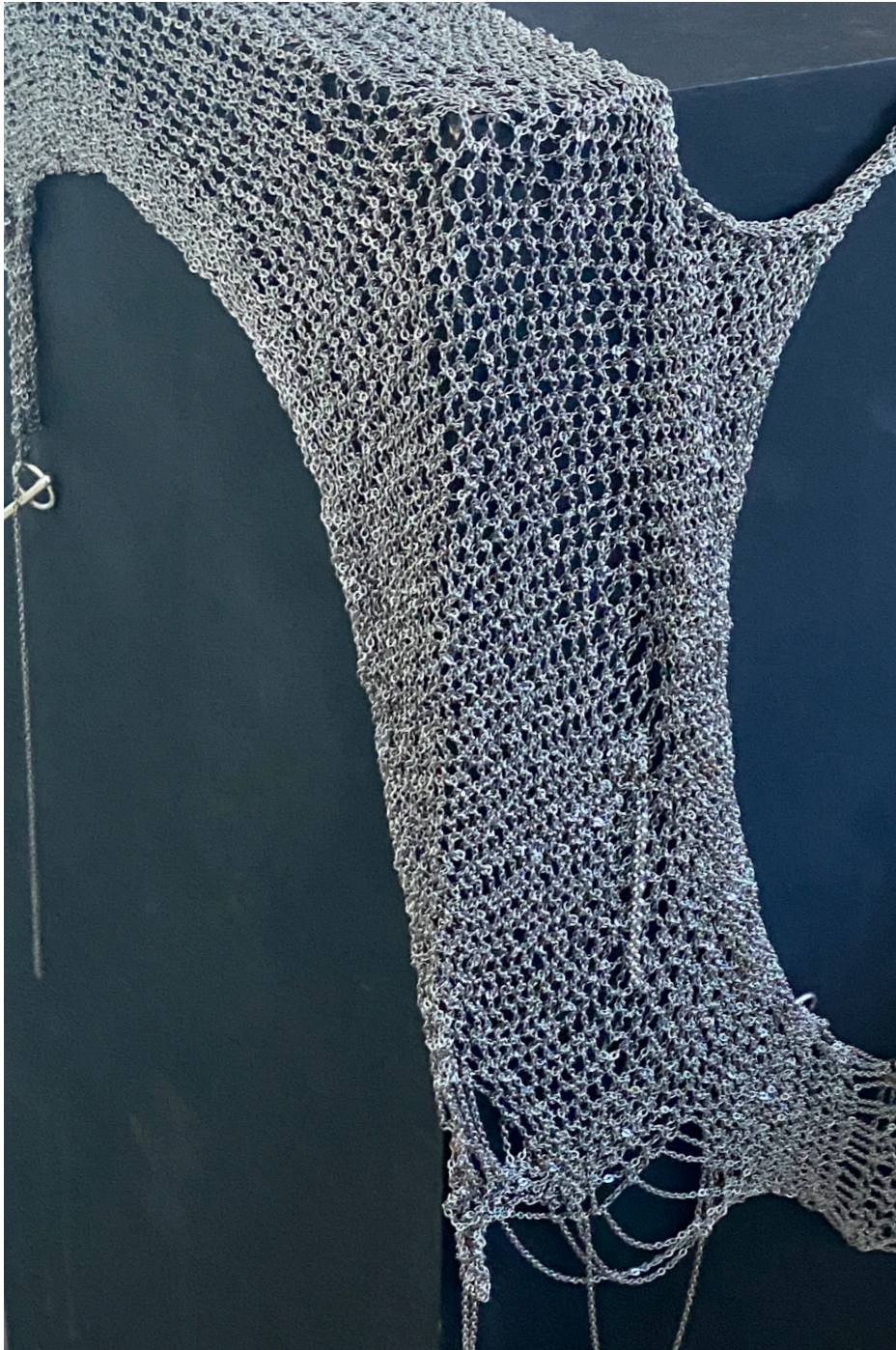
Trialling more plinth drapery, using a rose bush and a champagne flute for adjustment to object shape.

I transferred the piece outside to attempt multiple installations of the object, so as to draw attention to its functionality as a sculptural form. By removing the object from an urban environment and allowing for a natural and contextual drapery, I was able to research the connection to my own body that developed.

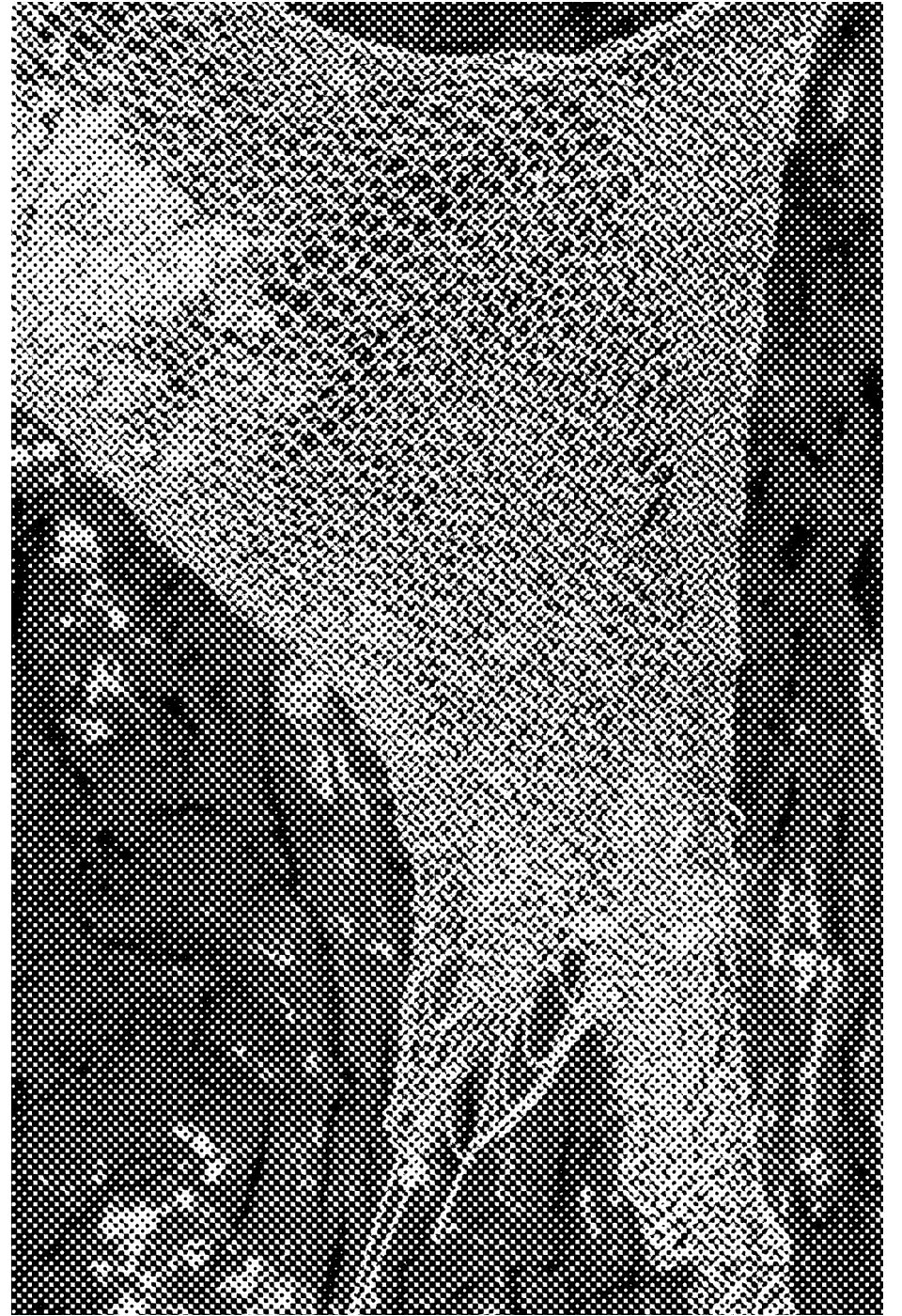
Context determines perception of ourselves in relation to any object or form. By redefining the context of this object I was able to interrogate the associations I had of the object as a garment. Functionality and wearability aside, the object retains our relationship to our own embodiment. Rather than ‘conferring art status’¹ upon an object such as this, I found that its functionality described its form, regardless of input. The object continues to retain its reflection of the body.

¹ Miller, Sanda. “Fashion as Art; Is Fashion Art?” *Fashion Theory* 11, no. 1 (2015): 25-40.









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