

A Thesis Presented to  
The Faculty of Alfred University

**Hypodermis**

by

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In partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for  
the Alfred University Honors Program

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“It is probably no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask....it is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves.”<sup>1</sup>

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The Erving Goffman quote shown above aptly describes the core concept of my evolving artistic practice. Throughout my work, I peel back the mask I present to the world — my clothing, my second skin — only to present another shroud, another obstacle in the way of my identity. I give the viewer the vulnerability of my body, but not the means to see me completely. The work I make thrives in a sphere where the established nature of reality and personal identity are thrown into question. It is a visually bold but subtle game I play with those who encounter myself and my work, as I challenge them to find me and, possibly, themselves within it. Beginning in photography, then expanding into using fiber and sculpture, my practice has grown around the truth of my personal experience and the playful artifice I employ to communicate it to the world.

### **My Photographic Practice and the Second Skin**

I am a tactile person, along with being deeply attracted to eye-catching patterns and colors, which is what initially spurred my interest in this body of work. I began taking note of why we adorn ourselves with fiber-based apparel everyday, and how these items compile to create our second skin. You might be asking, what is the second skin? It is a term I use to refer to clothing — specifically, the clothing we utilize to both conceal our identity and reveal our self-expression. How I personify and protect myself through my own relation to the “second skin” is what lies at the center of my artistic process. My interest and experimentation with this

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<sup>1</sup> Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Anchor Books, 1959, pp. 19.

segment of my practice began in the first semester of my senior year, when I had a meeting with contemporary artist David Kennedy Cutler. Cutler, whose work is featured on the right, suggested that I plumb the depths of my wardrobe as a way to find conceptual and physical material for my artwork and practice. This began a more serious exploration of my interest in clothing and pattern in relation to my own body and personal identity.



David Kennedy Cutler  
*Transplant* (2019)

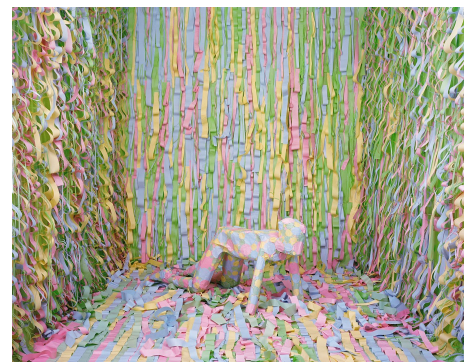
In addition to Cutler, I was also looking at the work of photographers Claude Cahun and Gina Osterloh. Cahun was an active artist from the 1920s to the 1940s who used self-portraits, costumes, and elements of surrealism to play with identity



Claude Cahun, *Self portrait (reflection in mirror)*, 1928  
Gelatin Silver Print, 9.6 x 7.6 inches

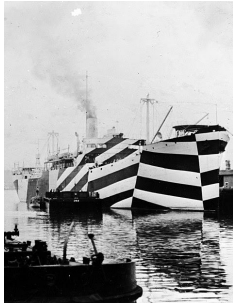
and subvert the enforced gender roles of the era. Osterloh's work focuses on self and identity, using tracing and mark making to alter how our eyes see photographic space and the body. Her earlier works, like the one to the right, use fabricated

rooms and bodies to achieve the same goal. The work of Cahun and Osterloh was crucial to the early development of my artistic process. Cahun's images pushed me to reexamine how I viewed and presented my identity, while Osterloh's photographs sparked my interest in fabricated bodies and camouflage. I began challenging the perceived reality of the photographic plane and my own outward identity using pattern as a direct result of these works.



Gina Osterloh, *Dots Front Misfire* (2008)  
Archival Pigment Print, 30 x 38.5 inches

At this point in my process I became interested in using different types of camouflage,



SS West Mahomet in  
dazzle camouflage (1918)

which led me to discover the bold patterns found on WWI dazzle ships.

These ships employed what is known as Dazzle camouflage, which I explored in tests and final pieces. Dazzle camouflage works by breaking up the outline of an object with geometric shapes and bright colors instead of

trying to make the item imitate its surroundings. This makes the camouflaged

body highly visible, but hard to visually pinpoint because its contour is no longer whole. This technique fell in line with the results I was trying to achieve in my photographs, and I ended up employing my own modified version of it in my piece *Crypsis*.

Using my clothing and patterned fabric I collected, I was able to display my body while successfully hiding the rest of my identity through visually challenging compositions.



*Crypsis* (2019), Photographic Print, 18½ x 22 inches

Lastly, I began drawing inspiration for my process from the aesthetics of Camp. While



Ezra Miller at the 2019 Met Gala

Camp itself is hard to pin down, it can be generally described as “a vision of the world in terms of style — but a particular kind of style. It is the love of the exaggerated, the “off”, of things being what they are not”.<sup>2</sup> Several items are utilized and favored within the Camp aesthetic, including furniture, clothes, and visual décor — objects that emphasize “texture, sensuous surface, and style”.<sup>3</sup> A modern

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<sup>2</sup> Sontag, Susan. “Notes on ‘Camp’” *monoskop*,  
[https://monoskop.org/images/5/59/Sontag\\_Susan\\_1964\\_Notes\\_on\\_Camp.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/5/59/Sontag_Susan_1964_Notes_on_Camp.pdf), pp. 3

<sup>3</sup> Sontag, Susan. “Notes on ‘Camp’” *monoskop*,  
[https://monoskop.org/images/5/59/Sontag\\_Susan\\_1964\\_Notes\\_on\\_Camp.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/5/59/Sontag_Susan_1964_Notes_on_Camp.pdf), pp. 3



example of this is some of the outfits showcased at the 2019 Met Gala, ‘Camp: Notes on Fashion’, which were also an early inspiration for my practice. My interest in Camp also happens to fall mostly in the clothes-related category, but I also resonated with its emphasis on artifice and exaggeration. In my own work, I used these ideas to take the clothing I already wear and blow it out of proportion. The way I dress is already saturated with pattern, and I challenged myself to push this in my photographs to the point where it was deemed “too much” — the point where I became impossible not to look at, but also nearly impossible to identify.

All of this information spurred me to incorporate heavily patterned clothing and fabric that I owned or found into my photographs, creating images that highlighted and hid my body in equal measure. As a result, I began using my interest in fiber and pattern to craft a form of oversaturated camouflage for myself. I stacked pattern on pattern on pattern, with my body woven into the center of this eye-catching cocoon. The result: images that allow me to present myself, my body and identity, but which inhibit the viewer from finding all of me. The pieces warp the reality of my body and the photographic plane of the images, creating a level of artifice and play that I utilize as both a point of intrigue and a form of protection. For while I use the designs and clothing I wear to communicate who I am, they are also a personalized form of armour meant for me and me alone.



*Who Wears the Pants?* (2019), Photographic Print, 34 x 42 inches

### **Moving 3-Dimensional and Getting Personal**

At this point in my process, I was happy with the photography I had produced, but I wanted to push further. Photography is my main medium, but I didn't want my work confined to

a strictly two-dimensional plane, even though I had visually altered the perception of space found within it. I began to push my art and its meanings into sculptural territory. I wanted to make photography come off the wall and use other mediums as a way of representing myself. I began working more physically with fibers and my images at this stage to start developing new ways of expressing my overarching ideas.

One of the first works that came out of this development was *The Reimagining of Omagna Purl*. I was interested in how sculpture, and fibers specifically, could be used to create



*The Reimagining of Omagna Purl* (2019)  
Dyed Fabric, Yarn, Thread, Shoes, Found Object  
37 x 51 x 51 inches

human-adjacent bodies and how I could use that as a form of personification with my repertoire of patterns. I knitted, stitched, and wrapped a new body for myself. This particular piece made me start to evaluate just how dependent I am on the patterns and clothing that form my second skin. The fibers and designs I utilize aren't just for show, they are also a metaphorical form of glue that I use to cement my outward appearance and sense of self — just like the

knitted band keeping *Omagna Purl* together.

I still wanted to utilize photography in this new phase of my process as well, so I looped back to David Kenndey Cutler's advice and raided my own wardrobe once again. I looked more closely at what types of clothing I had, and if they were marked for a specified gender. I wanted to continue playing with the reality of my body and the outward perception of my identity through my second skin. I placed the clothes on a scanner to



*Subcutaneous* (2020)  
Photographic Prints, Foam Board, Liquid Leaf  
14 x 18 inches

produce digital copies of the garments before printing them as large scale photographs. I then stacked the images on top of each other (like one would wear layers of clothing) before carving holes down through them, allowing each pattern to be revealed before ending on a photo of my skin. With the addition of foam board, the piece *Subcutaneous* became a photographic and sculptural object which exhibits the vulnerable surface of my body as I wish it to be seen.

On the note of being seen, I now circle back to what I stated in the beginning. I have given my vulnerability, and I have stripped back my second skin so that people may see me. I have split and reformed my body so I may find myself. I've set the stage of this game, but I can't do the work alone. I've done my part, now I invite you to try and find me.

Can you find me within the second skin?

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More importantly, can you find yourself?

## Artist Statement

I look at my body as object and outfit, as self and mask. I continuously display and inhibit my own image, using pattern and clothing in order to give voice to who I am, and how I see myself. Painstakingly slicing, layering, arranging, and suturing together images of myself, *my body*, and my wardrobe with all the obsessive zeal of a contemporary Victor Frankenstein. It is a strange form of therapy through self-cannibalism, one that I have been participating in for years. A marriage of body and pattern that conceals and exposes who I am simultaneously.

My current work utilizes photographic, sculptural, and textile elements — often in unison, resulting in visually stimulating and perplexing compositions. Manual photo manipulations are made into sculptural objects. Two dimensional images are pushed into three dimensional space through pattern and embroidery. Fabric shrouds skin, only to later become the flesh it once obscured.

Items as bodies, bodies as items.  
Body as form, forms on bodies.

All of these aspects seek to challenge what we see at face value, and what is actually underneath.

Who I am is for me specifically to know, and because of this the patterns that I use are my camouflage and my anchor. They hide and distort me in equal measure, bending who I am and making me near incomprehensible unless you take the time to look. They are my strength and my greatest dependency. My second skin, both literally and figuratively.

I will play, just as I do in my art and life, and let you try and guess who I am if you take the time to look. I am giving you my body, giving you my vulnerability. But, I am not giving you all of me — it is not my job nor my obligation to define myself for you.

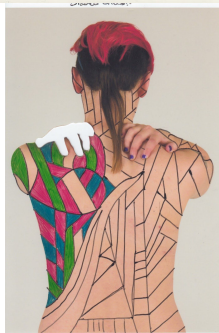
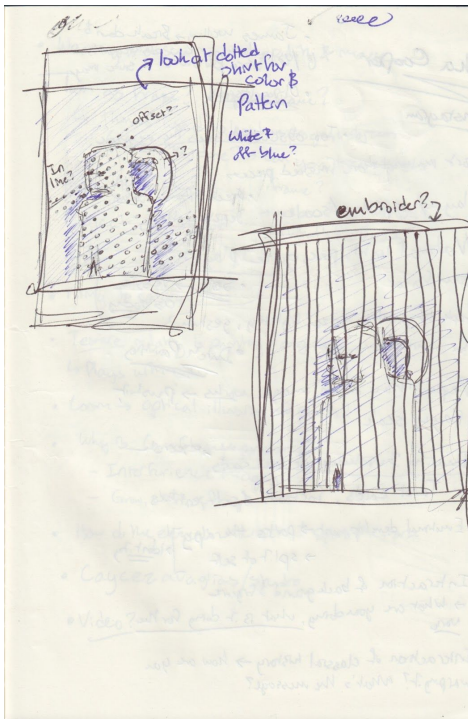
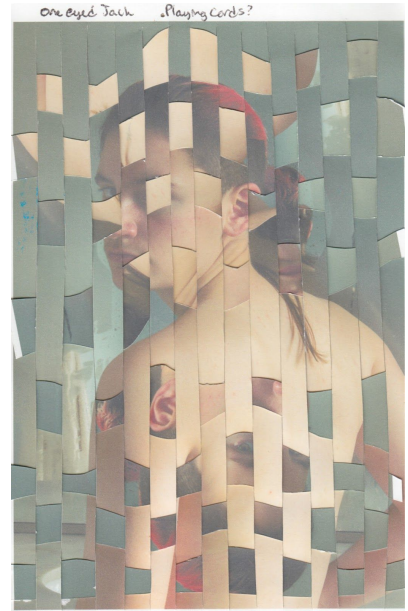
So....come find me if you can.

I dare you.

## **Sketchbook and Process Documentation**

Composed of physical test pieces, collages, photo studies, and notes from my personal sketchbooks, the following images are a visual representation of my artistic and conceptual development from 2019 to 2020. The sketches, tests, and writing exhibited in this segment informed the creation of my finalized artworks for my senior BFA exhibition, *Hypodermis*. The finished works from the exhibition can be found in the Image Catalogue following this section.





## David Kennedy Cutler

## Paul Sepuya

### Robert Rauschenberg

- What are things you look at when you are making work? (What are your inspirations?)
- There are many repetitions of hands, feet, bodies. What draws you to these things/parts?
- Your work seems very playful + methodical like M.C. Escher's style. Does your artistic process have these traits too?
- Do you tend to come up a concept/meaning for your pieces before or after they are made? Or does the meaning come in the middle?
- How do you go about making a coherent body/set-up of work? Do you have any tips?

• Body → Obscurity is good → + Hidden  
 ↳ Surrogate body parts → objects, patterns, shapes  
 • Date Stamp = Surveillance → camera following you  
 ↳ mirroring  
 • Cleanliness & game → Binary Hot/cold  
 • Print or mixjet onto silk Active?  
 • How do you translate your own style into your art?  
 ↳ look at your clothing



Q25 Lydon • Mini Bi?

• Tania Auerbach - Public Art Fund

• Jobs in NYC? Assistant ships

• Murder Award

• Max Schultz

• Iron on transfers?

• Pattern directly on body

Ink Jet  
Iron on  
transfers

• How do you approach a concept from multiple angles?

• Check compatibility

• Research different types of camouflage

• Check your connection to art history  
→ The gaze

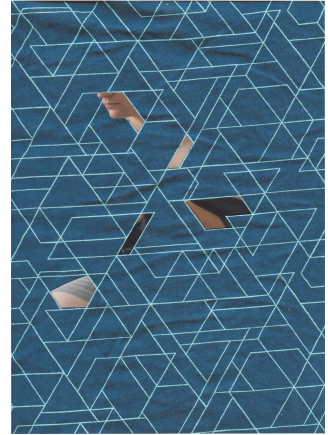
• What do I wear that makes me not seen?

• I'm showing you a pattern so you don't look at me  
↳ engaging w/ patterns  
↳ entertaining  
↳ hoops

• Look at sophomore senior picture for new photos

↳ As higher different  
dupes

physical  
props









Final Photo Critique [12/4] Title: Autograft

References: Claude Cahun, Paul Sepuya, David Kennedy  
Cutler, Fashion Photography, Gina Osterlough

Questions:

- Is this enough work? Does it need to be pushed further?
- What is a word you would use to describe these pieces?
- Does the scale of the work help or hinder it? Does it need to be adjusted?

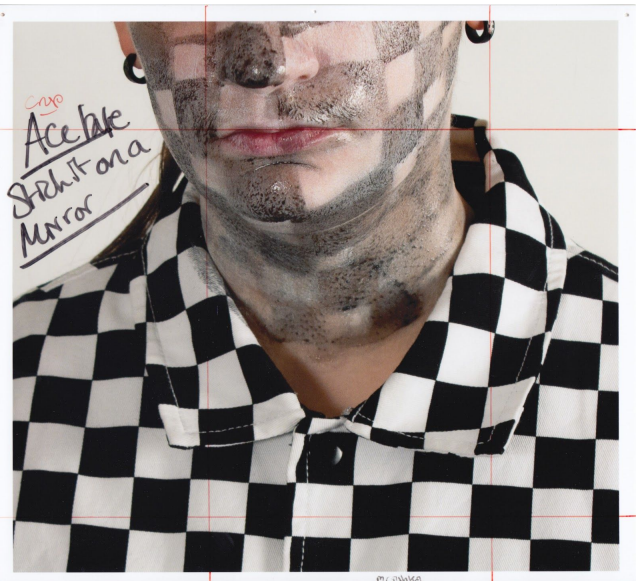
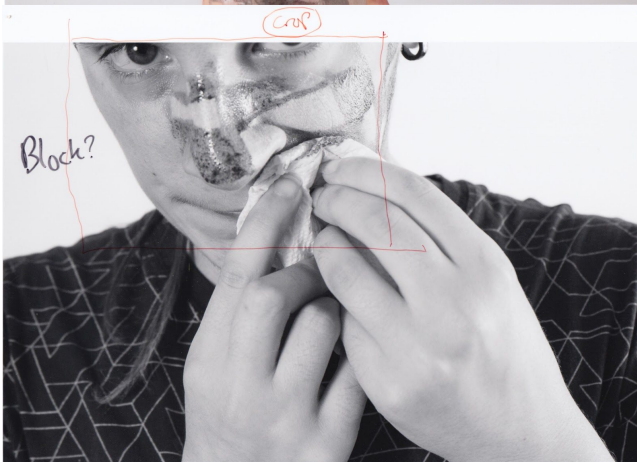
- What ways can I physically connect the photos?

Zanele Muholi: Chris Wiley

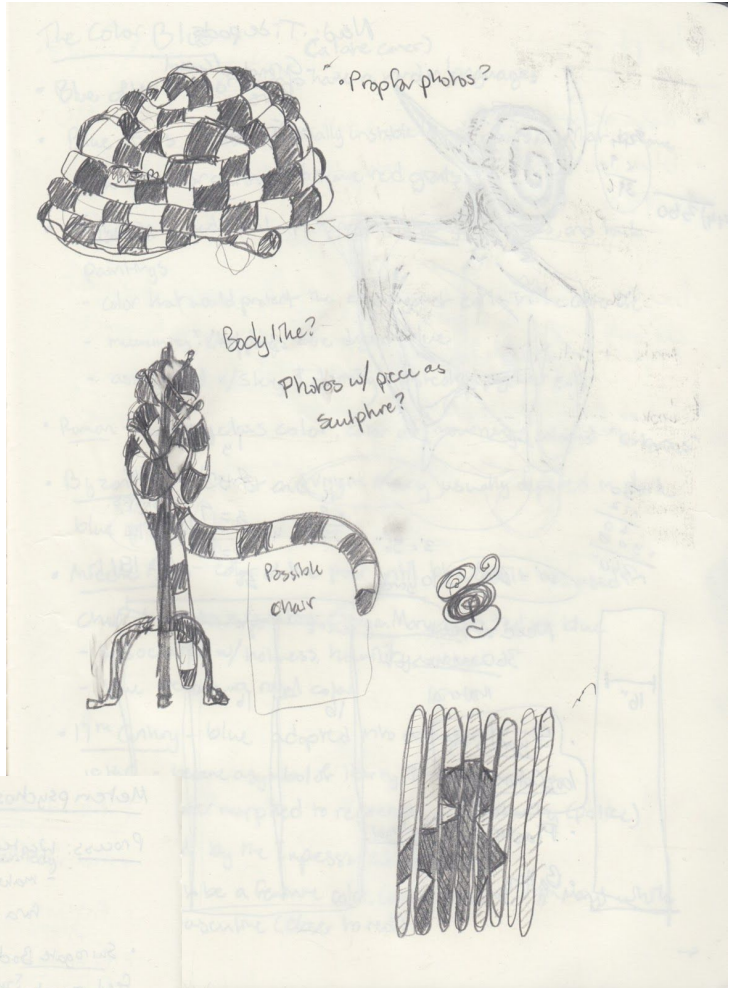
Mikalene Thomas

- Replacing body w/ collage?
- Think about the actions in your photos - performative qualities
- Pattern or Pattern - Depth!
- Do you want to be overwhelming w/ the depth - Yellow Wallpaper → Gender of Wallpaper
- World of Pattern - Scale is your friend
- Photo tex - Aqueous  
↳ wallpaper Non-Solvent

Person as Pattern?







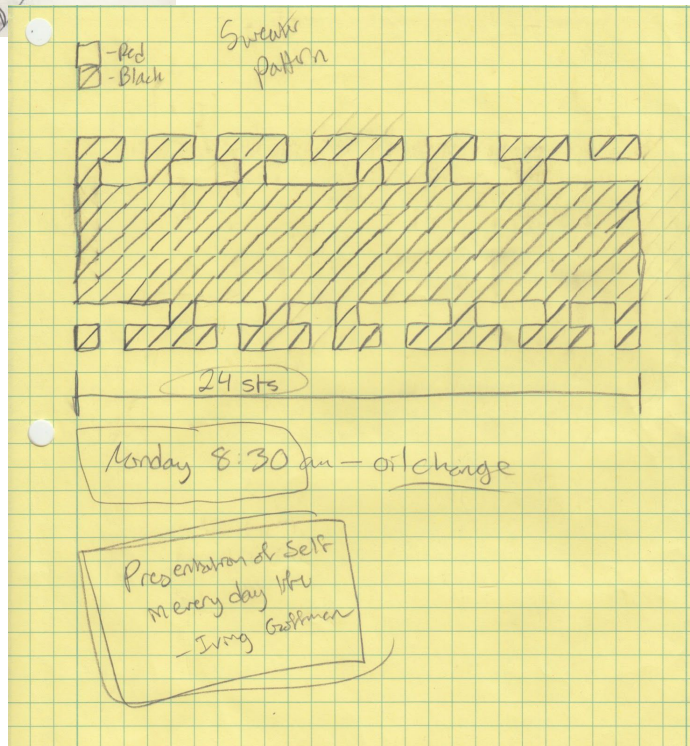
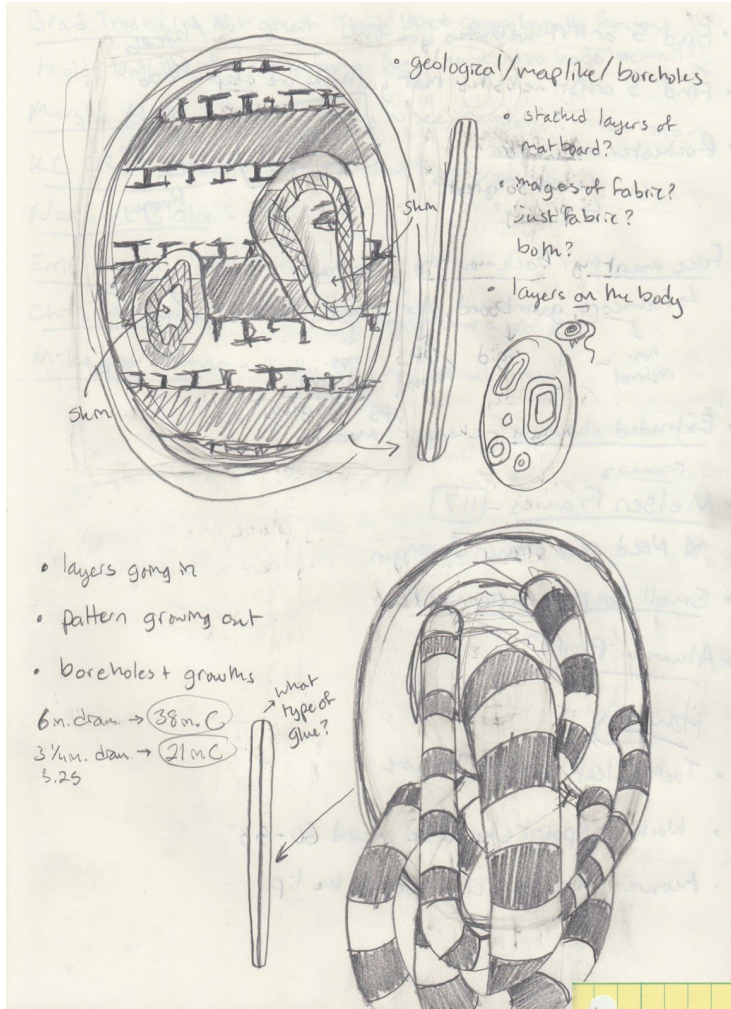
Metempsychosis Response

- Bodily vibe → color + tube
  - fleshy but off
- Body stand-in → what is the performance connection?
- Tension through wrapping?
- Human objects make things more human?
  - Does it need them?
- Shoes make it feel like it can move
- Containment (wrapping); sewing on shoes
  - force + tension
- Photos add emotional quality
  - ↳ Can the photos & the piece work separately?
- stitches help the relationships of the photos & tube
- Object has more of a performance → Don't need the person; resignation
  - Photos show a dependency
- Object becomes an extension of the self
  - shoes add a humor → It can walk!
  - ↳ Size matters!
- Photo → not given everything → good!
  - ↳ Scale
  - ↳ How can you push the photos like you push the fabrics?

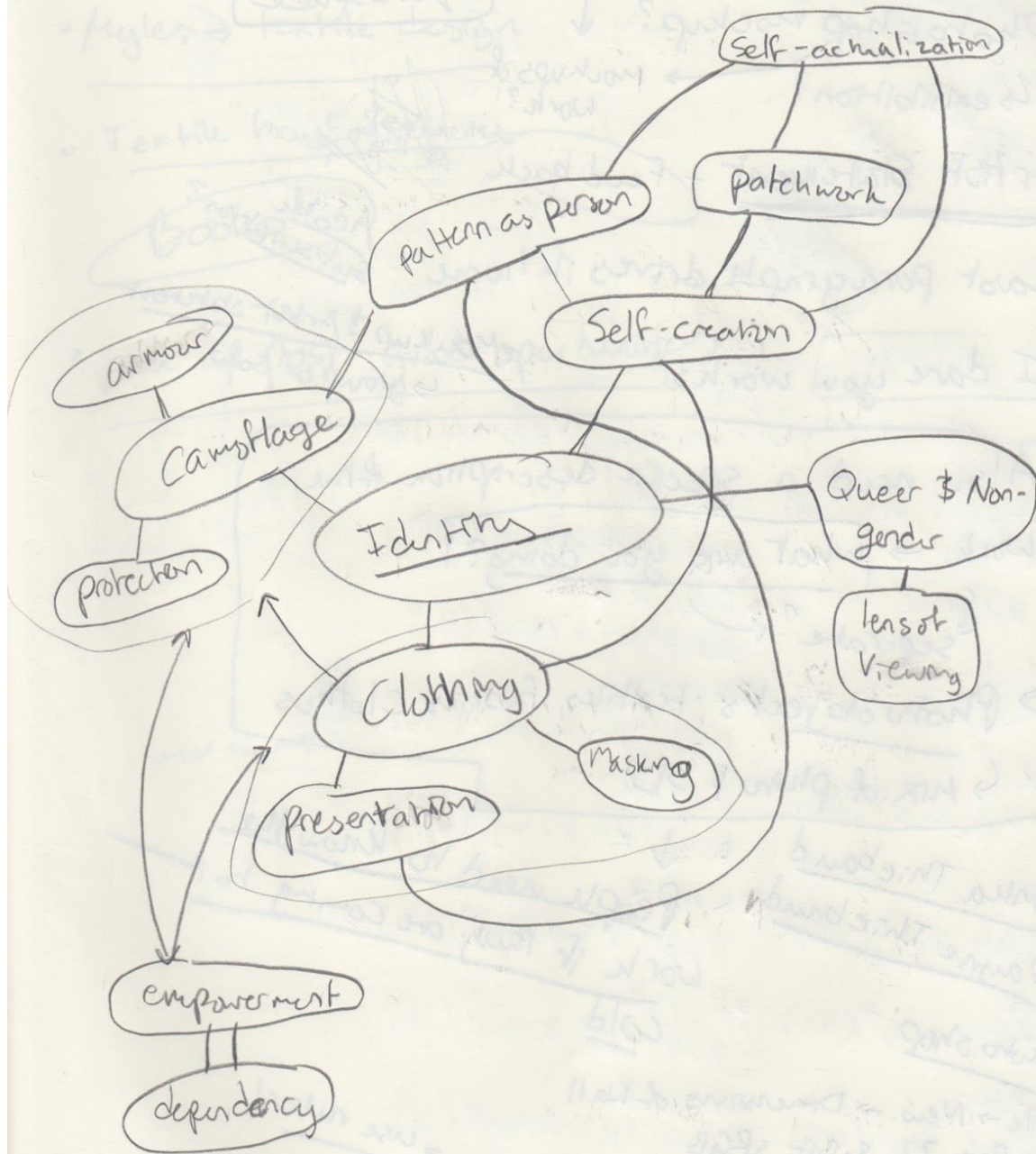
Could it be video?







# Artist statement





# Titles

- Crotch Shot/(Unidentified) - photo
- Who Wears the Pants?? - photo

↳ where's Waldo of gender/genitals?

- ~~Cling~~ Wrap? - photo, embroidery thread, fabric

- ~~Metempsychosis~~

Molar

agnpru

Roman

aglpu

e. lang

~~Plum~~

plum

aaron g. lump

puang  
upong

Roman P. Lang?

Aaron G. Lump

rango a

oar

loam

aaglxno pr

aaglxno pr

agnpru

Nagaa g. plumora

glam

Remagmg

Praun g. loam

Plumora Nag

- The Resurrection of Omagna Purl

Rejuvenation?

Omagna purl

O'Magna?

O'magna?

O'Magna Purl

O'magna Purl

Omagna Purl

• Chm Out?

• Button Up

• ChmUp, Button Down

↓  
8x10"

• Wrap (Inb) + Clng (Onb)

Bore - 14x18 m

Growth - 14x17 m

• Only Me, Only You - 24x30 m.



## Hypodermis Image Catalogue



*Who Wears the Pants?* (2019)

Photographic Print

34 x 42 inches





*Subcutaneous* (2020)  
Photographic Prints, Foam Board, Liquid Leaf  
14 x 18 inches



*The Reimagining of Omagna Purl* (2019)  
Dyed Fabric, Yarn, Thread, Shoes, Found Object  
37 x 51 x 51 inches





*Crypsis* (2019)  
Photographic Print  
18½ x 22 inches



*Only Me, Only You* (2020)  
Printed Acetate, Mirror, Liquid Leaf  
24 x 30 inches





*Wrap (Into) / Cling (Onto)* (2020)  
Photographic Prints, Embroidery Thread, Fabric  
Top: 16¾ x 21½ inches  
Bottom: 14¾ x 21½ inches



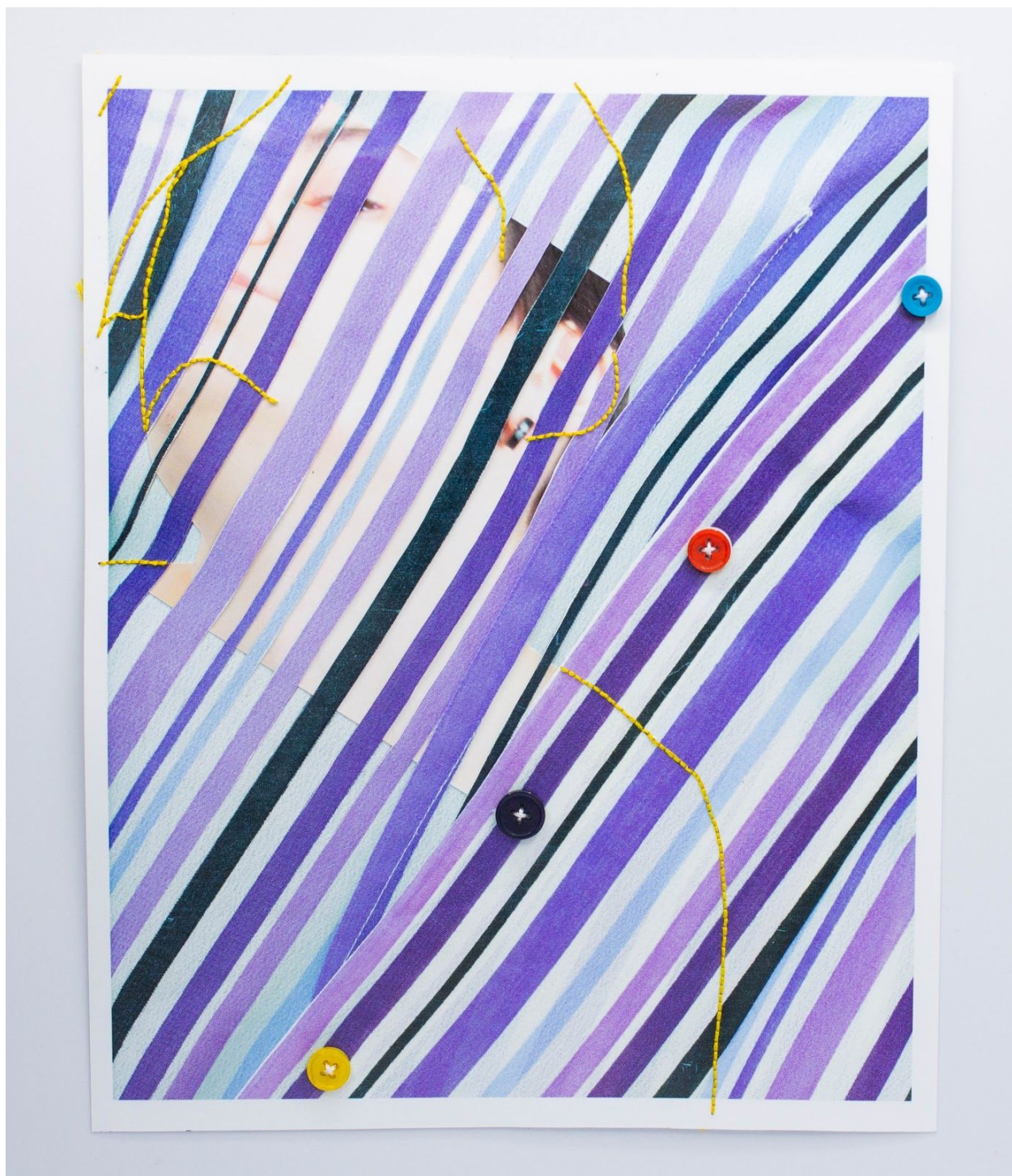


*Stratum No. 5* (2019)

Photographic Print

24 x 37½ inches





*Chin Up, Button Down* (2020)  
Photographic Collage, Embroidery Thread, Buttons  
8 x 10 inches





*Cocoon* (2020)

Photographic Prints, Foam Board, Yarn, Liquid Leaf  
14 x 17 inches

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*SS West Mahomet in dazzle camouflage*. 1918. *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dazzle\\_camouflage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dazzle_camouflage).