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IP section 3  
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## Photographs

The first costume I remember designing and creating was in seventh grade; I made three-foot wide butterfly wings and sewed an iridescent dress to match. It was my Halloween costume, and for holidays previous I had been an array of fanciful creatures, all created by my mother and grandmother. After this first endeavor I promised myself I would never wear a store bought costume again; I had too much fun designing and creating that I knew I would never be satisfied wearing anyone else's garments.

As Halloweens went by, my designs became more elaborate and my sewing skills improved. I began to look at art schools for college and found my home in the University of Michigan School of Art and Design. Now having just completed my senior Integrative Project, I see that my love of fibers is deeply rooted and it is not surprising that I have spent a large portion my life designing garments. Over the years though I have become interested in many other things too, and the unique curriculum of A&D has allowed me to pursue those different areas.

My Integrative Project is a combination of costume design, set design and photography. When I came to the School of Art and Design, I knew I loved fibers but I did not know that I would come to love photography just as much; half of my time in A&D was spent as a fibers student, the other half spent taking photography classes. In my Integrative Project, I was given the freedom to explore these two media further and refine my skills as a fibers artist and as a photographer. The summer before IP started I knew I wanted my project to reflect my desire to design advertising campaigns, and after many years of browsing through magazines, I had all the inspiration I needed. I began planning photo shoots where I could combine the media that I loved and end up with a photograph equivalent to a one-page advertisement.

My senior thesis work is a collection of photographs capturing humorous events or situations. Approximately two weeks were spent developing each idea that I then turned into an installation, and each installation I created was captured in a single photograph. I spent a year developing a solid thesis project. In the beginning I wanted to create large installations of the whimsical, fantastical and humorous, but this idea was immediately scaled down when I began working, not because I lacked the skills but because I found that my ideas were too many for one installation. I thought I would find more success in several smaller installations as I could create them faster, which kept my creative mind churning and allowed me to move as quickly as my hands could sew. Projects were installed in my 8 x 8 ft studio space where I photographed and directed styled sets. Each shoot took its own shape but inherently reflected the same themes.

My first attempt was assigned as a "throw away" project: we were asked to create the worst possible project we would ever make, to assure us that in the future we could do no worse than that which we had already done. A humorous assignment, I used the cheapest and most accessible material I could find, which happened to be newspaper collected from my apartment building lobby. I wallpapered my entire studio, sat in the middle of the space, and read a copy of the same paper I had just taped to my walls while a friend snapped a photo. In critique on



*Newspaper*, Alice Richardson



Revenge of the Goldfish, Sandy Skoglund

Monday I was surprised by the extremely positive response from my peers. The understated and unpretentious photograph was a huge success, and I was encouraged to pursue this line of creation.

Starting with the second installation, I decided to act as sole photographer. Inspired by my study abroad in Italy, I fashioned my studio into the Amalfi Coast and took the only autobiographical picture. Again met with praise during critique, I began to form a better idea of where I wanted to take my project. I started making decisions that I would stick with for the remainder of the IP to ensure of a sense of unity in the final photographs. I wanted to take every picture and I wanted an obvious element of humor.

Two years ago in Philadelphia, PA I saw an installation by Sandy Skoglund, an artist I have been influenced by for years, perhaps more than any other artist. Her installations depict the most fantastical sights in scenes from the strangest worlds. In high school I started constructing my own small locker installations, and began competing in the Philadelphia Flower Show creating floral installations. I worked for two years in college as a fashion stylist for the student publication Shei magazine. From this I drew the connection between the installations from high school and the photo shoots I was styling, and I started



"Amalfi Coast," Alice Richardson

constructing shoots on my own. I found that I could bring life to the still installations when I added models, which I never did until I started working for Shei. The first time I jumped behind the camera to take the picture myself, I was delighted to find that the image that I saw through the viewfinder captured everything I had been trying to say but could not while using just one medium. When I combined fibers, photography and installation, I found that I could create anything I could imagine.



Paparazzi, Alice Richardson

I started thinking a lot about the models I was going to be using in each installation, and I looked to Cindy Sherman, another great influence of mine when it comes to photography. Her untitled film stills convey entire stories in one frame, just like I was trying to do. The models in her work are almost more important than anything else in the photograph, be it the scenery or other props. Cecil Beaton is another one of my favorite photographers but for a very different reason. Cindy Sherman asks her viewers to question the content, while Cecil Beaton relied on composition and beauty to carry his work. My



Marisa Berenson, Cecil Beaton

process is simple but definite, and I have very exact ideas of what I am ultimately trying to convey. I know what I want and do not want in these photographs. I might not have known right away what I was trying to say, but I had particular certainties that I knew each photograph must exhibit. I knew I wanted each picture to make the viewer pause, and maybe exude a laugh. My next step was to make a list of possible installations and then proceed with each idea until I had several complete ideas to begin working on. Of the ideas on my list of a dozen shoots, I chose to construct five as they had the strongest themes and meanings and could be pushed the farthest regarding costume and set.



"Untitled Film Still #58," Cindy Sherman

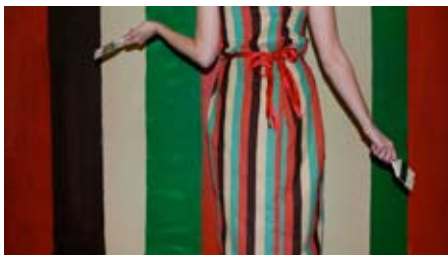
Prior to college I had collected Kohler advertisements for their "Bold Look of Kohler" campaign. I had six from the series of many, and each one was designed and created by an artist in residence.

Each advertisement flaunts a Kohler product but also stands alone as its own creative work. These advertisements were a huge influence on my creative endeavors, not just in my Integrative Project work but also in every photo shoot I have ever done. The two oldest cutouts of Kohler advertisements I have had since middle school, and I carried them everywhere. I always knew that I would use them in some way, and the first thing I did when I moved into my new studio was hang them on the wall. The Kohler advertisements all require a suspension of disbelief, and all are unique. After my first two shoots, I decided to be a team of one and try to create a picture so dynamic it would rival those ads.



*The Bold Look of Kohler*

My next successful photograph happened by accident. In my first two photographs I saw that an artificial background was something that people responded well to, so I decided to concentrate on the foreground/background relationship. After careful consideration, I designed and created the first garment to use in my photographs, as I had only been focusing on concepts before. Despite a fitting the dress was too big for the model, and I had to pin it right before the shoot. At the end of the shoot I asked the model to turn around so I could quickly snap some pictures of the bow in the back, because she had only been photographed from the front. I designed the dress to be seen from the front, so the bow in the back was unnecessary, but I wanted to photograph it anyway. It turns out that was the best decisions I made all year: one of the four pictures I took of the back of the dress would be displayed in an exhibition, a furniture store, an office, a cafeteria, and on a website. A huge success, this photograph gathered a lot of interest in my work.



*Stripes, Alice Richardson*

Eager to start a new project that would be equally as amazing, I picked another concept from the list and started working on the costumes. I was too hasty to repeat my last success, and both of my next two shoots were less than mediocre. Despite the guarantee of the first assignment that we could do no worse, I was faced with an inherent dilemma at the end of the first semester. Instead of improving, my work actually regressed and I was forced to slow down. I had to look critically at my previously successful pieces. I did not know what had made them so successful. Over Winter Break I spent a great deal of time thinking about it, and when I returned for second semester I had made a list of qualifications even more concrete than the first.



*Potted and Green Road, Alice Richardson*

In the last two of what I deemed “unsuccessful” photographs, I had concentrated more on making the garments because I loved the effect that the garment had had in the third photograph. Meticulously planning the costume, I let the landscape take the second seat, and decided to shoot each in the A&D photo studio, which offered a professional photo background in white, black, or gray. Despite the well-tailored costumes and conceptualized set, I found the pictures were not successful unless every detail was paid attention to, and every aspect of the shoot attended to. I added “handmade background” to my list of necessities for future shoots. During this time I decided to take a break from the work I was doing, as I seemed to have mentally

run up against a block and I was not hatching any new ideas that seemed complete or worthy of spending time on. I was especially cautious of wasting time after I had just spent the last month working on two shoots and ended up with nothing but a new set of guidelines.

I have a very good family friend in New York who was the former Fashion Editor for Interview magazine, and when I was in high school I went to the city to visit her at the Interview offices. Since then I have always loved reading Interview and am a current subscriber. The magazine underwent a redesign and unveiled its splendor in August 2008. Inspired by the new issues of simplicity, I decided to narrow down my ideas to the bare minimum. I turned back to my first three successful photographs and scrutinized them for some clarity as to their winning status. I decided to focus once again on the



Interview Magazine, December 2008

background while still creating new costumes as well. I decided to use the exact same theme as the third photograph, but a different execution. To give myself a greater challenge, I decided to use two models. The ensuing photograph took a month to design and create but its success was worth the wait. This newest photograph exhibited the qualities I had hoped for in the two before it, and I felt like I could once again be confident in my work.

As the concepts improved, my peers and professors pushed me to explore my photographic options. Acting as photographer was extremely rewarding, but as a team of one, that meant I also had to edit my prints as well. At the time, my editing skills extended no further than slight color correction in Photoshop. Under the tutelage of several of my peers however I slowly began to improve. In this last picture I was given the challenge of digitally expanding the photo, and despite reservations I undertook the obstacle and was very pleased with the result.

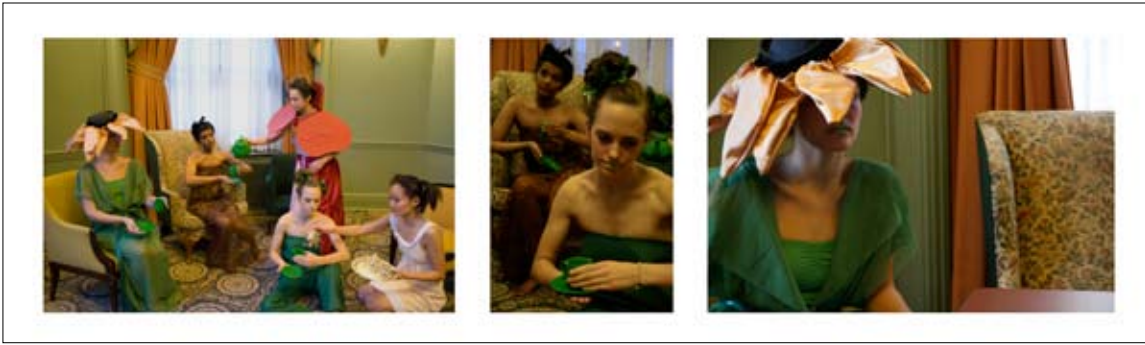
For my last shoot, I had nothing but the Senior Integrative Project Show in mind, and I knew I would need something bigger and better than anything I had previously produced. My goal at the beginning of the year was to end up with a collection of photographs that I could add to my portfolio and someday show to advertising agencies as evidence of my great work. I had said in the beginning that I wanted to work constantly over the next year, materializing shoot after shoot, learning what was good and what was bad, what worked and what did not, so that in the end my last shoot would be the perfect culmination of a project worked on for a year.



Lace, Alice Richardson

I spent seven weeks working on my last shoot, checking and re-checking every detail, making sure that everything was tested and secured before the final shoot. I was working with five models, two hair/makeup stylists, and one additional photographer because I would be so busy directing seven people that I might not get the one great shot I needed. Every model was checked for a fitting and conducted a test shot with me so I could determine if there were any changes that needed to be made before the final shoot; I was determined to have everything run smoothly. I was so caught up in designing and creating costumes for each of the models and gathering props that I decided to take a chance on using a real environment for a set, despite my rule that I was to only use handmade sets. I do not know what made me decided to neither construct the set myself nor act as sole photographer, but I was entirely right in my choice. By focusing on the costumes, I gave myself more room to make what I really loved and in the end the best part of that shoot is looking at how fantastic the garments look on the models.

In addition to the aforementioned changes, I decided to add photographs to my one-page limit.



*Tea Party, Alice Richardson*

In print advertising, I had only ever seen one or two page spread ads, so when I set about to make my own advertisements, I decided that I would chose one photograph to represent the whole, because in advertising you only get one page for your product. After discussing this in a critique however, my peers strongly suggested to me that I consider viewing this shoot as my feature, multi-page spread in a magazine. After all, I was taking upwards of 200 photographs during a single shoot and using only one picture to define the whole. Treating this shoot as a multiple-page spread would enable me to not only showcase more of my photographic ability but allow the viewer to see detail shots of the elaborate costumes that I spent the majority of my time working on. If each shoot only took a couple of hours to shoot, and I spent a month working on it that means that time was not being accurately represented in my photographs. I made the decision to exhibit more than one photograph, if it turned out that I did in fact have several great photographs that made a cohesive body of work.

The shoot lasted four hours. I chose three photographs to represent this latest shoot but initially I did not particularly like any of them. They were great pictures and the photographer did a wonderful job, but I did not think that they fit my theme. After talking to my professors however I decided to include them. This collection of photographs showed my sewing skills really well and the pictures were really great. Of course this was last minute by the time I decided to print them, and then there were obstacles. Due to complications in printing these photographs were unable to be displayed. Because I did not take the photographs, the pictures were not taken in a high resolution and consequently I had to print them in a smaller size. The store where I had the others printed however would not print these new pictures small unless they were standard size, which they were not. I had to print them myself but then I could not adjust the color correctly and they kept printing wrong. Unfortunately there were so many problems that I could not print the photos in a good enough quality to display, and so they have never been viewed in the context they were intended for.

The enlarged prints of my four successful photo shoots were displayed as planned during the Senior Integrative Project Show. Despite not being able to display my last photo shoot, the pictures I did display looked exactly they way I had wanted them to. As it turns out, I ended up with exactly what I aimed for in the beginning of the year: I wanted a collection of photographs that I could feel proud of enough to include in my portfolio. The photo shoots did improve more and more over the course of year, just I had hoped. The point of doing many shoots was to learn from mistakes and figure out what it takes to conduct a successful shoot, and as the images show, I think I did attain that goal.

***Photographic Credits***

*in order of appearance:*

“Newspaper,” Alice Richardson, Integrative Project

“Revenge of the Goldfish,” Sandy Skoglund

“Paparazzi,” Alice Richardson, photo for *SHEI* magazine

“Amalfi Coast,” Alice Richardson, Integrative Project

“Untitled Film Still #58,” Cindy Sherman

“Marisa Berenson,” Cecil Beaton

*The Bold Look of Kohler*, two prints from the same series

“Stripes,” Alice Richardson, Integrative Project

“Potted,” Alice Richardson, Integrative Project

“Green Road,” Alice Richardson, Integrative Project

*Interview Magazine*, December 2008 cover

“Lace,” Alice Richardson, Integrative Project

“Tea Party,” Alice Richardson, Integrative Project