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Integrative Project Senior Thesis

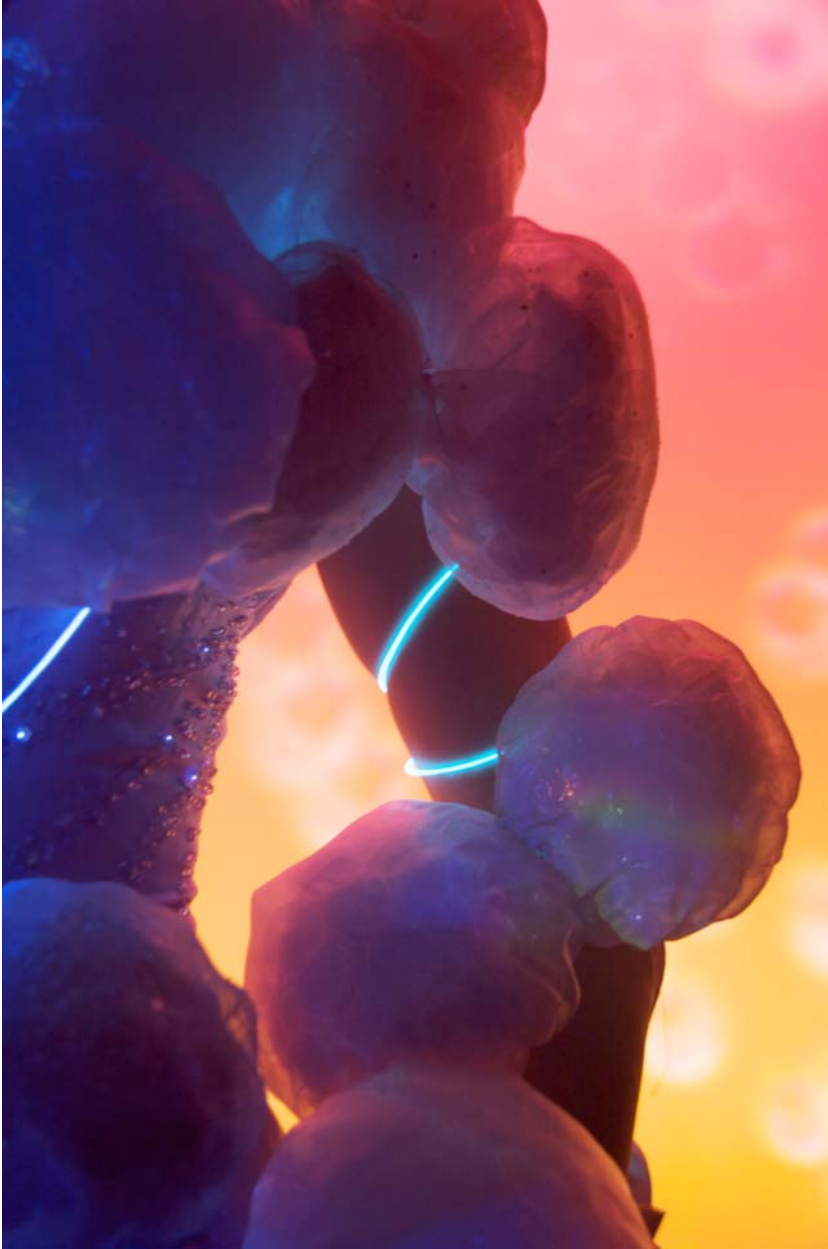
Winter 2010

### Baited by Beauty

Duality: a dual state or quality. The theology behind duality includes the idea of two eternal principles, one that is good and one that is evil; the belief that a human being embodies two parts, a body and a soul. Within the form of costuming and wearable art, I intend to explore how the engendered body is affected physically or emotionally by two opposing, yet compelling, issues facing men and women. The pieces I've created are focused on fashion history, as well as today's standards of fashion and masculinity versus femininity. Specific issues include the duality between beauty and pain, constraint and revelation, protection and vulnerability, and many more which lend themselves not only to mixed media but also wearable costume. Through these explorations of duality, fashion and fashion history, have led to the creation of my wearable art.

To explore the idea of a dichotomy between two opposing ideals, I used the human body as my setting. Wearable art is one that lends itself to many experiments, and it is an ideal stage to explore two opposing ideas. This is not only for the aesthetic appeal of a wearable costume, but to show how the two ideas work together or against each other. It begs questions like, how can we stay away if baited by beauty? I believe that there is something engrained within us to appreciate things that are beautiful and not be able to look away from something that is painful. These ideals also venture back to influences of fashion through history where different types of body manipulations were considered the height of beauty.

Promotional Image for "Baited by Beauty" showcasing the "Jellyfish Dress".



One of the pieces where I explored a duality was inspired by a dream I had where I was overwhelmed by jellyfish in the middle of the ocean. There was an intense feeling of suffocation and claustrophobia, but at the same time I remember the calm and the glowing beauty of the jellyfish. Finding out how this translated to the body was interesting because I began with the base of an old prom dress. Adding additional fiber materials, as well as bubble wrap, fiber optics, and electroluminescent

wire, I want this piece to convey a sense of calm and beauty, while also evoking a sense of being overwhelmed by the jellyfish like form.

As I explored materials in the jellyfish piece, I found that fashion, costuming, and especially wearables, has the opportunity for the utilizing different media. The choice of what media to use for what piece was as important as the concept. Along with this of course is having a freedom of materials and to not restrict oneself to one idealistic

material. Fabric alone can be limiting and unimpressive though perhaps it is what you do with it, how it is manipulated to become something else entirely.

Electronics are exciting, shocking, and complex, but how can they convey the dual ideas or will they overshadow the body's struggle within a piece? How does using metal hardware contrast with delicate ribbon, or could I use helium and latex within a fibrous cocoon? Each individual contrasting piece was carefully thought out and I did not want to limit myself in my explorations of various materials. I expanded my horizons



Alpaca felt, LED's, & Silk Organza used in the "Dream" piece  
Model: Corey Davis

beyond the expected and played with physical things: multiples, fibers, metals, plastics, energy, found objects, and anything that drew me in.

The process of how to utilize materials within a piece is also vastly important. When using playing cards do you sew, glue, or staple? Do you cold fasten or bring out the power tools? How does the process in which you attach each piece relevant to the piece you are creating? Sometimes the process is the heart of the physical thing that I've made and sometimes it is irrelevant, merely the means to an end. When working with the idea

of duality, I explored a multitude of processes along with my many materials depending

Here I model the first constrained piece.



on the idea I focused on from the

beginning.

In my body of work I have been very interested in manipulations of the body. I mostly worked with my own body and explored ideas of being forced into a wearable or idea. In a previous course I had to devise my own constraints in a three-part project, and my project began with a wearable that was to constrict my body, my hands were attached to my legs, while still being uncomfortable and revealing.

In the second part of the project, I was also

constrained but I had to include an outside force that held some power over me. I chose my computer and attached myself to that, equally, if not more, constraining than the previous work.



Modeling the second constrained piece while attached to my computer.

In the third addition of the project, I had to use the same ideas but also include other people. I created a wearable installation that attached three people to a video screen who were forced to view whatever outside force manipulated the film. To me, these pieces helped in my development of ideas and began an interest in what I'm working with now, the idea of duality. Why was the first piece comfortable and yet uncomfortable? Constrained and still revealed? The materials in these projects weren't always as meaningful in the work though the stretch material used in the first two constraints of the project were key in creating the tightness and showing the range of movement I still had within my arms and also when attached to my computer.

These thoughts carried over to when I was working on my card dress. The cut of



the dress is based on a classic 1950's type evening gown with a mermaid skirt, inspired by such classic cinema as "Guys and Dolls", and "White Christmas". This work was a key piece in the development of my IP thought process and was created with duality in mind. This is an example of a piece that was driven by materials. I was drawn first to the cards because of the multiples and was interested in what using playing cards to create a dress would mean. I called the piece "Luck Be A Lady" and was interested in exploring the ideals of putting women on pedestals and how one can be personified into

"Luck Be A Lady", exhibited at Work Gallery Ann Arbor, Fall 2010

something so intangible as luck. The dress itself was formed something like armor, a form that would be constraining to the wearer in movement and in comfort.

They say opposites attract and apparently the idea of a duality between two things seemingly unrelated, attracted me. Eli Siegel, founder of Aesthetic Realism, said, “All beauty is a making one of opposites, and the making one of opposites is what we are going after in ourselves.” Aesthetic realism is an idea I find relevant because its intention is for humans to see everything as well as we can, and if we don’t see it contempt is winning the battle over aesthetics. In art there are few things more important or relevant than aesthetics, and that holds true within my body of work as well.

Researching fashion history as well as philosophy has been paramount in my



“Archduchess Marie Antoinette, Queen of France”  
By Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun

project. The ideals of fashion through history and what the ideals of fashion and beauty are today are completely relevant to the ideas I’ve been working with. When creating art wear, it is practically impossible to avoid influence from stigmas or silhouettes of the past. I am especially interested in the idea that “beauty if pain”, because it greatly relates to the dichotomy I’m focusing on, specifically how can something painful be beautiful? For centuries women’s fashion in particular have invented devices that conform the body into the fashionable silhouettes of

the time. In the alter 18<sup>th</sup> century it was panniers, which made it almost impossible to make it through doorways, and giant decorative headpieces that were incredibly heavy and cumbersome. In the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Victorian corset, often made of steel, was prevalent and most likely matched with a hard bustle during the 1880's. Despite these incredible physical inconveniences, these fashions were indeed beautiful.

It brings up the question of how does social change affect fashion? Society in many ways affects the dress of the time, in the time of the suffrage movement for example, hemlines raised, and corsets began to disappear, it was a time of liberation for women. So, in many ways, I should think of not only how I perceive each of



An advertisement for women's corsets circa 1900.

the opposites I'm investigating, but also how it is portrayed or changed by society. This history of fashion also makes me consider, while beauty and pain seem to be opposite, perhaps they actually work well together. Can a duality have that symbiotic relationship? I believe they can and hope to exhibit this well through some of my wearables.

Within one of my pieces I call the "Ribbon Dress", I'm exploring the ideas of fashionable silhouettes and being constrained and revealed. It reads as a Victorian dress

“Ribbon Dress” – Satin Ribbon and Tulle  
Model: Kasia Strzalkowski



but the exposure of the midriff and legs oppose that time’s ideal of being covered up. The materials themselves, ribbon and tulle, suggest delicacy, while the form suggests

structure and rigidity. It is a nod to the Victorian era and a commentary of how those ideals have changed or can be changed.

Exploring the ideas of duality was a great jumping off point for my project. I am a great believer in an exploration of different aesthetics within my wearable art as well as different influences of history, philosophers, and artists. My collection as a whole was eight pieces

presented together in a live show called “Baited by Beauty”, and showcased in the most ideal way I would want my work shown, on live



“Baited by Beauty” Live Show Finale



models. I included theatrical elements of a full production and was able to capture the spectacle that was important for me to incorporate. For each look I designed makeup, music, and movements that exhibited each piece individually. I couldn't have been happier with the collaborative aspect of my show and that I was able to pull off a show on this scale.

Within this work each piece represents something different to me and excites me in a different way. They represent my body of work, my aesthetic, my future, and a never-ending interest in duality. For me, there will continue to be questions about what makes two opposites compelling, and what processes are the best to use in exploring these ideas. Either way I know that my result will be interesting and compelling. Through this exploration of materials and ideas I have incorporated thoughts on the engendered body, femininity and how we are affected by the ideas and by wearing these garments.

While I still have questions, I feel that without questions there would be no projects, and no energized place to work from. Utilizing this energy, I plan to continue to explore contrast within form and material, through wearable pieces focusing on the concept of duality, and how the body exhibits them.

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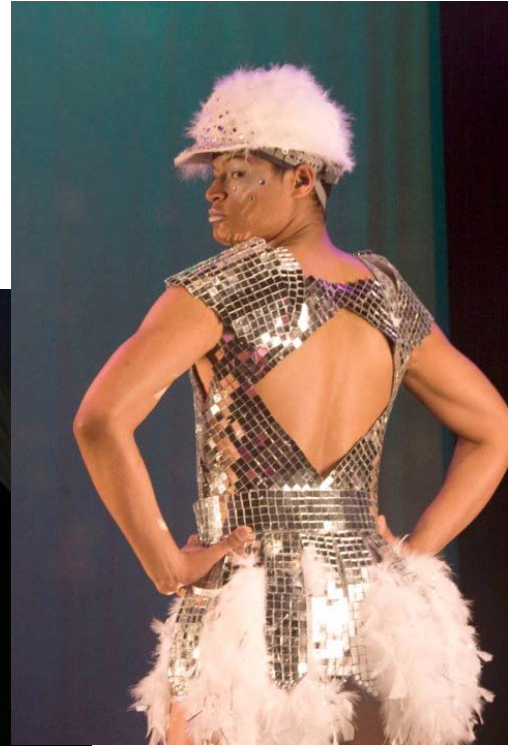
The remaining pieces of "Baited by Beauty"



"Tree"  
Model: Marguerite Woodward



"Shemale"  
Model: Myles Mershman



"Disco"  
Model: Terry Burleson



"Peacock"  
Model: Lara Espinoza



"Gold Corset"  
Model: Anastasia Alekseyev