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THE FLOWERERS

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Master in Design at Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand.

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ABSTRACT

The Flowerers engages with ideas of tangible and intangible familial threads, driven by the impact Alzheimer's disease has had on my maternal bloodline. I aim to preserve lost memories by translating them into material objects, bringing together my two design disciplines, fashion and photography, to develop a process for creating multidisciplinary works, contributing to a legacy project. The approach to the work has been a way of processing my grief and reconnecting with my family heritage.

As my grandmother recounts stories of her own and other family members' pasts, recurring floral motifs emerge as a prominent theme, shaping the focus of the project. Employing sustainable and alternative photographic processes such as lumen, cyanotype and phytogram printing, the abstract characterisations convey visual metaphors, symbolising life and death, portraying stories of four generations of women from my mother's side, concluding with myself. These images are printed onto dead stock fabrics and constructed into garments using minimal waste fashion processes, embodying the tradition of dressmaking passed down through my maternal lineage.

Photography is integral to *The Flowerers*, serving as both its inception and conclusion. It delves into the intricate nuances of memory and the hybrid interpretations woven throughout the project. The constructed garments are exhibited in highly conceptualised fashion photographs, to contextualise the complex inter-generational story of my family tree.

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Mum

Thank you for always being there for me, no matter what. For being my sounding board, the hairdresser as well as being the best photoshoot assistant. I love you. This project is just as much yours as it is mine.

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For Grandad, Gladdy and Little Gran

May your legacy live on.

INTRODUCTION

On Wednesday 9th August 2023, my maternal grandfather, peacefully passed away in his sleep after battling Alzheimer's disease for sixteen years. He is the fourth member of my maternal family to depart due to this cruel illness. Until age twenty-eight, I had not experienced the loss of a close relative. For me, the concept of grief was an unknown experience which I now had to navigate. The first and most impactful symptom of Alzheimer's is memory loss. My grandfather's memories gradually diminished in the process of his condition and now, the recollection of his life has vanished along with his physical entity. The chance of more of my maternal family members being diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease is high. This realisation feels like a looming storm cloud which will hover over me for the rest of my life.

The person who has been impacted most significantly by dementia is my grandmother. She has lost her mother, her older sister, her husband and her sister-in-law, with recent saddening news of her two younger sisters being diagnosed. My Nana is now my last living grandparent. She and I have always had a very special bond as I was the first grandchild born and she was present at my birth. Some of my most cherished childhood memories are of trips to the Coromandel in the school holidays with my younger brother, to stay with Nana and Grandad. We always looked forward to this special time spent with our grandparents, which are now memories I grasp onto dearly, as my grandfather is no longer with us.

After my grandfather's passing, I felt compelled to reconnect with my family heritage, therefore I conducted semi-structured interviews with my grandmother, to gain insight into my genealogy. This prompted a strong urge to prevent these memories from disappearing - a self-imposed duty and responsibility to preserve my family's history, to be passed onto the next generation and continue their legacy. This left me to question; how do I materialise intangible memories within a photographic medium?

I come from a long line of creative women who engaged in dressmaking, farming and horticulture, all of whom needed to be resourceful to provide for their families, dating back to 1880 where my maternal ancestors set up a dressmaking business in Aratapu, Northland. These skill sets have been passed down through many generations, leading me to incorporate aspects of these crafts within the project. I was kindly gifted a bountiful supply of dead stock silk, lace and tulle fabrics, along with fastenings, accessories and sewing equipment from one of my mother's oldest friends who is a bridal designer. She stored boxes of these materials in my father's workshop for many years, following her relocation to Hawaii from New Zealand. These beautiful textiles were waiting patiently to be brought out of storage and reestablished into something meaningful. The contents became the foundation of *The Flowerers*, enabling me to follow in the footsteps of my descendants by repurposing these forgotten materials.

I was able to explore sustainability within a photographic context when I participated in the *Photography and the Advanced Darkroom* course at the start of 2023, as a precursor to the Master of Design. In this module, I experimented with cyanotype printing onto fabric which is the most sustainable of all the photographic processes, due to its use of iron compounds which are nontoxic. I printed onto a defective sustainably made dress, kindly gifted to me from Wellington based sustainable brand Kowtow. I investigated bleaching and toning the print with varying natural solutions, avoiding using chemicals throughout the entire process. During my extensive research, I became

aware of other alternative photographic processes which utilise expired photo paper and film, termed as 'unusable' as they cannot operate in their intended purpose. I have continued researching and utilising these processes to practise sustainably through all methods implemented in *The Flowerers*.

The Flowerers is established as a legacy project, created to process past, present and future grief, whilst preserving the lineage of my family tree. The project is made through the lens of a practice-led design methodology. As a photographer who creates work in mostly traditional fashion and portraiture outputs, I adapted my practice to accommodate specific themes whilst incorporating my two design disciplines, photography and fashion design, with a focus on sustainability in both areas. The narrative is centred around five generations of women, translated through visual metaphor and actualised as abstract alternative photographic images of flowers which are printed onto dead stock fabrics. The fabrics are then constructed into garments using minimal waste processes and photographed in highly conceptual sets to communicate the project's central messages, shown in figure 1.

My contextual research is divided into four categories which reflect the different components I have engaged with during the project. In Part One: Loss, "Comprehending Grief within Photographic Metaphor" acknowledges therapeutic practices used by people in mourning which involve the use of legacy work and constructing visual metaphors to make sense of their newfound emotions. These are further contextualised in the analysis of the relationship between photography and memory. "Expressive Depictions of Death" examines five projects centred around grief in written, painting, photographic and fashion outputs, which utilise the remedial techniques discussed in the previous chapter. In Part Two: Story Telling, "The Narrative Eye" examines photographers Annie Leibovitz and Tim Walker in their innovative methods of capturing illustrative narratives through fashion imagery. "Floral Inspired Fashion" compares Christian Dior and Alexander McQueen's floral interpretation of life and death in dressmaking.

In Part Three: Repurposing, "Photography as an Agent of Sustainable Change" compares past and recent changes within image making, showcasing examples of historic processes adapted in a contemporary context. Photographic game-changers, Anna Atkins, Bea Nettles, Edd Carr, Heidi Kirkpatrick and Angela Chalmers are examined for their use of alternative photographic practices and cross-functional work. "Dressmaking: A Sustainable Ethos" delves into the New Zealand history of sustainability in home-made crafts through the lens of Rosemary McLeod. Sustainable fashion

processes are examined where fashion brands, Talia Byre and Kowtow are discussed through their engagement with these conscious practices. In Part Four: Processes, "Methodology in the Making" discusses the positioning of the project, photographic testing, research, print development and garment design processes. "Building upon the Narrative" describes the multifaceted conceptualisation of each garment and final photograph for the five contributions to the body of work.

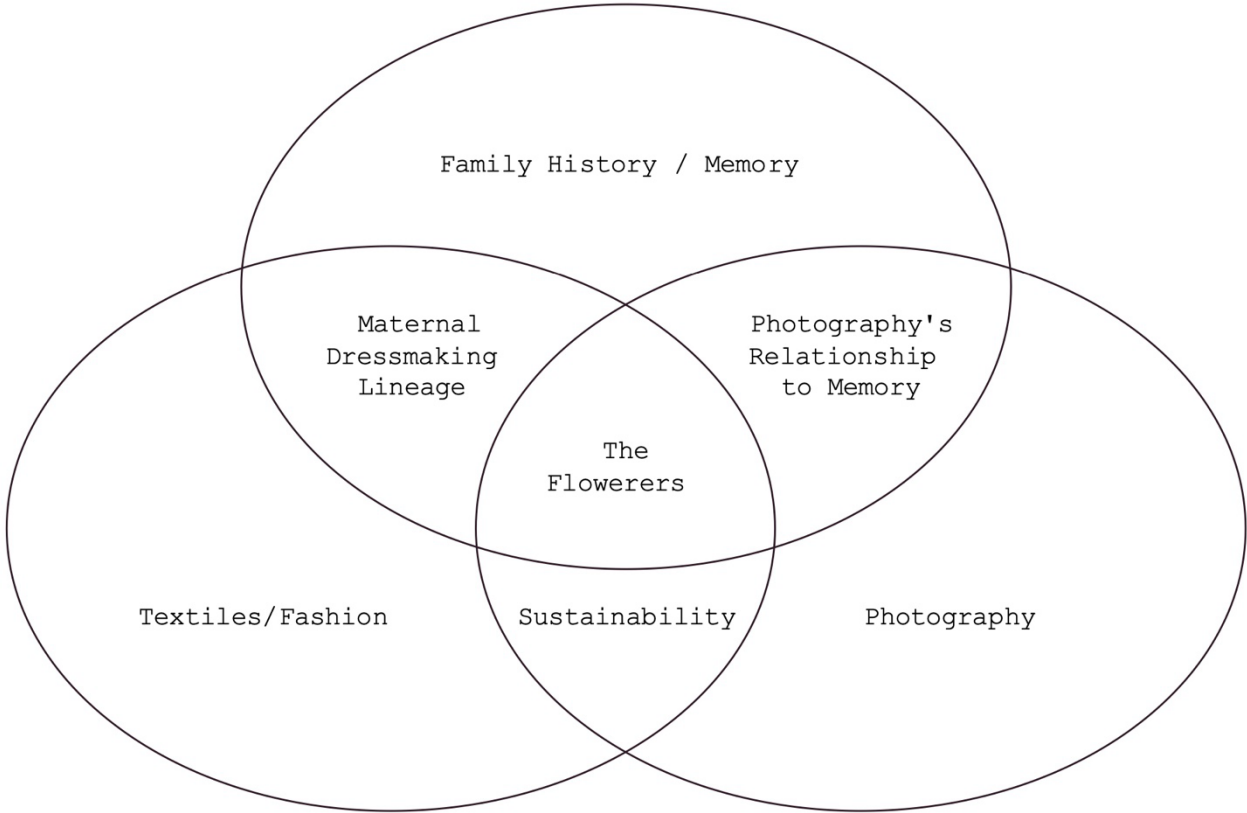


Figure 1. McGill, R, (2023). *The Flowerers Themes Venn Diagram.*



Figure 2. Lipsey Family Archive. (1963). *Lynda and Bob cutting the cake* [Photograph].

PART ONE

LOSS

Comprehending Grief within Photographic Metaphor

In *Making Memories Last: The Art of Legacy Work*, Wendy Griffith discusses an alleviating technique she uses with people who are coming to the end of their life due to terminal illness. The act of dedicating time to pass on cherished moments in one's life to people they care about, so their legacy can be shared before they depart. Griffith (2011) explains, "legacy work is the process of transforming these thoughts into action" (para 6), while a legacy project can be structured in varying manifestations, making a scrapbook, writing a poem or filming a video montage, among others. By reconstructing information which is usually shared orally and creating a visible keepsake that serves as a tangible token of remembrance, empowers the reminder to be accessible across generations. Todd Hochberg (2014) views the concept of legacy work as an intention to "reframe or transform an experience or perspective, and open space to begin to integrate challenging circumstances or feelings" (p. 151). Hochberg reflects on the value of expressive making as beneficial for both those approaching end of life and those who are grieving, coming to terms with loss.

Leigh Davies (2014) debates how grief can defy logic with "the need to hold on while letting go" (p. 146). Within *Grief and the Expressive Arts: Practices for Creating Meaning*, Davies explains how the process of forming metaphorical imagery can permit the coinciding act of mourning and making. Developing one's own depiction of challenging experiences encourages the bereaved to decipher their perplexing emotions and rebuild them into tactile embodiment. This method can provide an outlet for healing by allowing alternative interpretations to materialise. Davies (2014) elaborates how crucial acceptance of the unknown is to navigate which threads of consciousness will emerge and how they will take shape in a myriad of analogies.

In "Photographic Metaphors", Irene Renzenbrink (2014) describes how visual metaphors, conceived from images can carry powerful significance when aiding individuals who are navigating grief. When working with her clients she frequently uses photographs of nature including dislodged trees, the contrast of serene and stormy water as well as textural rocks and cliffs, which can be associated with challenging emotions due to their lively characteristics. The idea of tackling momentous challenges after losing a loved one could be linked metaphorically to the strenuous task of climbing to the summit of a mountain (Renzenbrink, 2014). Renzenbrink reflects on a time when she used this practice, connecting a Katherine Mansfield quote alongside an image she took of a plastic bag caught on a fence. This amalgamation actualised her feelings of homesickness whilst grappling to adapt to a new stage of life which "gave form to my

experiences of grief and provided me with a powerful metaphor, a container or carrier for my emotional turmoil" (p. 198).

Photographs can often be perceived as equivalent to memories as they "bring visions of the past into the present" (Langford, 2007, p. 3). Images that capture significance from past events can transport the beholder back to moments frozen in time. Inside *Scissors, Paper, Stone: Expressions of Memory in Contemporary Photographic Art*, Martha Langford (2007) examines how memory and imagination intertwine, both capable of envisioning alternative possibilities of "what might have been" (p. 16). When viewing an image, only physical depictions are present. The context is absent, therefore the act of ideation and constructing one's own truth come into effect. Langford (2007) suggests that the earliest framework of legacy begins from the compiled family album. As a means of visually sharing a family lineage, elder family members reach for their collated collection of snapshots which consolidate their life and the people within it. The assortment of reminders from times past commemorates lives lived along with an altitude of emotions that coexist within the paper mementos. These photographs sustain weight, as they materialise deceased relatives, allowing the bereaved to hold onto people who no longer tangibly exist. Yet, logically, photographs cannot be classified as memories. The camera is a catalyst that enables moments to be recorded, surfacing as a tactile keepsake, unaware of the value it may bear for future generations.

Expressive Depictions of Death

Inside *Flower Power: The Meaning of Flowers in Art*, Moore and Garibaldi (2003) state "the most powerful use of flower symbolism in the visual arts can be seen when artists choose to identify either themselves or others with the emotions associated with these traditional meanings" (p. 27). Flowers began as a primary subject for painting from as early as the 1600's, which later followed through into photography. In historic art, flowers were depicted for their physical beauty but also as symbols of tradition, culture, myths and legends. As flowers bloom, wilt then perish, they have often been associated with the delicate nature of human existence (Moore & Garibaldi 2003). This analogy is demonstrated in the 17th century genre of painting, Vanitas. Flowers used in vanitas paintings symbolise fleeting time as well as the celebration of death, being a vital aspect of the mortal experience (Moore & Garibaldi, 2003). Jerome Hanover (2020) references a resemblance in Nick Knight's photographic series *Roses*, "this is doubtlessly why his works seem to be part of the tradition of the vanitas, allegorical portraits that remind us of the ephemerality of time and the fragility of human life" (p. 35).



Figure 3. Van Nieulandt, A. (1636). *Vanitas Still Life* [Oil on Panel]. Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Adriaen_van_Nieulandt_II_-_Vanitas_Still_Life.jpg



Figure 4. Mitchell, K. (2014). *The Stars of Spring Will Carry You Home* [Photograph]. <https://www.kirstymitchell.art/diary/the-stars-of-spring-will-carry-you-home/> Reprinted by permission of Kirsty Mitchell.

Kirsty Mitchell's (2014) five-year project containing seventy-four multidisciplinary artworks, titled *Wonderland*, explores ideas of grief and memory within a fashion photography context. Mitchell struggled immensely after the loss of her mother who passed away due to a brain tumour. She channelled her heartache into *Wonderland* by drawing upon the fantasy worlds illustrated in the fairytale books her mother read to her as a child. Her upbringing in the English countryside became the backdrop for her elaborate imagery where she built upon these beautiful landscapes by creating fantastical sets and intricate costumes, as an escapism to the turbulent emotions she was navigating. Mitchell had a longstanding career in the fashion industry before her departure into photography, enabling her to create all the meticulous ensembles featured in the series. Mitchell (2014) describes the essence of her piece, *The Stars of Spring Will Carry You Home*:

It was about her acknowledgment that nature has always been her guardian and a metaphor for my mother throughout. Her fusion with the flowers was to depict this acceptance and the trust she placed in the path she would be led along during her final days (para 2).

The tragic death of Alexander McQueen's mentor, friend and confidant Isabella Blow, influenced his Spring/Summer collection in 2008, *La Dame Bleue*. The collection paid homage to Blow in a multitude of ways, from her signature scent filling the air as attendees were welcomed into the French arena, to the elaborate crested headpieces, made by Philip Treacy, another friend and protégé of Blow, as a nod to her memorable hats which she adorned at every outing (Gleason, 2012). Blow and McQueen shared a love of birds which became a prominent theme throughout the colourful showcase. Dresses were embellished with real feathers and digitally printed onto lengths of fabric. Before the show started, a light installation of an enlarged bird in flight started to move, with echoing sounds of flapping wings. McQueen expressed, "Isabella flew. The collection is exuberant and excessive. It's about her way of thinking and that way of thinking brought light into fashion" (as cited in Gleason, 2012, p. 173). Look 25 appeared as a simplistic black, sequined sheath dress, yet from certain angles, a golden portrait of Blow's face is revealed from within the shimmering ensemble. The collection did not convey sorrow, it was a true celebration of Blow's life and acknowledgement of the impactful contribution she made to enhance the careers of many emerging designers.



Figure 5. McGill, R. (2023). Look 25 at Alexander McQueen Mind, Muse, Mythos exhibition at National Gallery of Victoria [Photograph]

The Memory of Clothes contains a compilation of short stories, essays and poems, delving into the contributing authors individual experiences, telling stories of sentimental garments that have impacted their lives. Robyn Gibson (2015) poetically recalls the journey of her mother's unexpected death, with the dreaded aftermath of being tasked to sort through her material belongings in *In My Mother's Wardrobe*. She reflects on a profound moment of her hand caressing the hanging clothing, stopping on pink silk chiffon, the dress her mother had worn to her wedding. Gibson could recall how distinguished her mother appeared, adorned with pearls around her neck and wearing matching pink shoes (Gibson 2015). Monumental moments of our lives are defined by what we wore at that time, giving clothing the power to act as a memory prompt. Gibson ended her piece of writing with the following quote:

Sometimes late at night as I am drifting off to sleep, I hear soft murmurings emanating from my wardrobe. If, I listen very carefully I can hear two special dresses sharing secrets, their tales of love and loss and perhaps waiting ever so patiently for the next generation of women in my family to cherish them as I have done. You see clothes are so much more than material objects to cover our bodies. Woven into their very fabric are histories and associations that enrich our lives. And if we carefully unravel the threads, you discover memories that were otherwise lost (p. 21).

In the book, *Keeper of the Hearth: Picturing Roland Barthes' Unseen Photograph*, over 200 practitioners were tasked with making a photographic or written contribution to respond to Barthes' description of *Winter Garden Photograph*, an unpublished image of his late mother (Cotton, 2020). This publication examines how a written passage with vague, yet detailed information can be depicted through a variety of executions by artists from varying backgrounds. Sara Macel's offering is an archival family photograph. The image unveils a woman named Anne, getting ready with her bridesmaid before she is to be wed to Macel's father. The snapshot reveals her mother Kathleen in a mirror's reflection, behind the bride to be. Five years later, Anne passed away while giving birth and Macel's father remarried Kathleen a year after (Macel, 2020). The parallel in this image is poignant as it unknowingly predicts the future. The women within this candid image, taken for the purpose of an addition to the family album, were unaware that pivotal events would subsequently change the outcomes of their lives. Macel (2020) explains her personal understanding of the image, "for me, this photograph exemplifies photography's inescapable connection to death and the role photographs play in reimagining our pasts in search of meaning" (p. 238).



Figure 6. Macel, S. (1970). *Untitled (Bride Anne with Bridesmaid, Kathleen Reflected)* [Archival Family Photograph]. The Macel Family Archive. Reprinted by permission of Sara Macel.

PART TWO

STORY TELLING

The Narrative Eye

Annie Leibovitz images exhibit emotion, escapism and romance through her skilful gift of being able to capture a narrative within one exposure (Wintour, 2021). Her work showcases a breadth of versatility from over fifty years of creating memorable fashion and portraiture collaborations. Leibovitz has created many reenactments of acclaimed childhood fairytales, portrayed as elaborate fashion editorials published in Vogue Magazine, among other renowned publications. Leibovitz (2008) expressed the creative freedom she was able to explore, "what's great about doing the Vogue work is that it seems completely appropriate to go over the top. Vogue is about dreams and fantasy" (p. 132). In the *Alice in Wonderland* editorial, featured in the December 2003 issue, the top designers at the time were asked to create their own rendition of Alice's iconic blue dress. The designers also featured in the editorial, playing celebrated characters from Lewis Carroll's renowned title. In the April 2005 issue, Leibovitz envisioned Drew Barrymore as a regal Belle, dressed in haute couture gowns in whimsical gardens and lavish castles, pictured next to a man with a lion's head, as her Beast. These images demonstrate Leibovitz's mastery in storytelling in how she can adapt written word into meticulous photographic portraits, illustrating visually rich material that takes the audience on a journey of enlightenment.

Another celebrated photographer who is inspired by fairy tales and accomplished in his ability to obscure the boundaries between fantasy and reality, is Tim Walker (Nowness, 2012). The worlds Walker can conceive in his praised editorial work is theatrical, ethereal and whimsical, created in aspiration to portray the image in his imagination (Walker, 2019). Robin Muir (2012) introduced the book, *Story Teller*, "in an age when enchantment is in short supply and imaginations are constrained by reality, Tim Walker's photographs remind us to be alive to the incongruous and the unexpected" (p. 17). In figure 8, Walker characterises his models as otherworldly creatures. Stella Tennant wears a sizeable hare's head, beside her, Charles Guislain braces wings fluttering from his back (Walker, 2012). Walker's curiosity for the sublime was broadened when he was tasked with selecting eleven individual items from the Victoria & Albert Museum's diverse collection, including 18th century illustrations, tapestries and snuffboxes, to use as inspiration for a new body of photographic work (Walker, 2019). These works showcase Walker's ability to formulate photographic concepts from historical objects and create an associated comprehensive narrative. The ingenuity Walker and Leibovitz undertake in engaging with non-photographic substance to conceptualise complex

photographic depictions, is why they are noted as some of the most well-regarded photographers today.



Figure 7. Leibovitz, A. (2005). Drew Barrymore in Christian Lacroix Haute Couture in *Beauty and the Beast* Vogue April 2005 [Photograph]. Flickr.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/28470639@N02/4443992356/in/album-72157623522008001/> Reprinted by permission of Winter Phoenix.



Figure 8. Walker, T. (2010). *Stella Tennant in Hare Mask and Charles Guislan in 'Bird of Paradise' Crown with Sword, Howick Hall, Northumberland, 2010* [Photograph]. Flickr.
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/elliottjames/15413981722/in/photostream/>

Floral Inspired Fashion

Fashion designers engage with diverse material to formulate inspiration for their collections. Christian Dior is known for his floral references within his clothing, built from an emotive interest shared with his mother and sister, who became influential pillars for the women Dior designed for (Sachs, 2020). He was fascinated by the colours, shapes and botanical information as well as the language of flowers and what they represented. The intrigue of botanical structures in correlation to the female form, guided Dior to create modern designs in progression from rationed utilitarian fashion which ignited a style revolution. The rose was one of his favourite flowers, which provided inspiration for both his first collection in 1947 and his last in 1956 (Stella, 2020). Dior's most established collection featuring 'The New Look', was influenced by floral compositions. Dior termed the women who wore his clothes 'flower women', emphasising the hourglass silhouette and creating voluminous pleated skirts emulating a blooming bud (Cullen, 2018).

In *Fashioned from Nature*, Oriole Cullen compares Christian Dior and Alexander McQueen through the enduring influence of nature within their work. Whilst Dior had a fascination with the feminine contours, colours and essence of flowers, McQueen's inspiration was drawn from the animalistic aspects of nature, often using feathers, horns, fur and skin to adorn his creations (Cullen, 2018). McQueen is distinguished for his thematic performances, emulated by a dark romanticism, unlike Dior. He incorporated flowers in his collections frequently, as a metaphor to reveal his fascination with death and the brutality of life, linking to the symbolism conveyed within vanitas paintings. In his Spring/Summer 2007 collection, *Sarabande*, the most impactful look of the collection displayed a dress covered in real and silk flowers. Petals fell from the dress as the model walked the runway, emphasising their temporary reality. McQueen explained, "things rot. It was all about decay. I used flowers because they die" (as cited in Bolton, 2011, p. 183). Cullen suggests similarities to Dior's iconic *Miss Dior* dress, sharing a cinched waist with cascading skirt, adorned with flowers, showcased in 1949. These two looks demonstrate the versatility in which these designers can interpret the same subject matter, deciphering their visible features as well as their connected symbolism. Dior emphasised the flowers' beauty, whilst McQueen accentuated their fleeting existence (Cullen, 2018).



Figure 9. DeSousa, J. (2017) *Dior Dresses: Taken at the Christian Dior exhibit, Paris, 2017* [Photograph] Flickr.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/mustangjoe/52817494879/in/photolist-2otit6r-JZXPft-Z7jlfq-2iu9acu-2gxN6Q6-2oRm1HD-2oRkS5Z-22dRZsq-2gAhGpQ-XopzZY-Xr8zB6-2pwfuiP-8nZuKj-8bmtDQ-2dwhpJx-2bypoKS-26cCM4E-2dq2Vtd-2j44ZMe-2hAEMLR-2hP5pQ9-KGonx8-5D3as1-2aJRr8j-27KeuWq-E1gVuL-4dmoDJ-8EVRmL-2iw3e6y-KHDgNC-2i3fhz5-2cYLDgt-KFSXXb-adJxB1-2nbjh7J-9oYfy-2nbpKGz-2d1duCZ-2chexYa-2cyXJc5-aZ9noi-7i3G4x-CC1HDe-ZhVn6W-9huEfs-SYAqLk-Tx2m2Y-aoTmRX-8tKHfN-aoW3LW>



Figure 10. (2011). Dress, "Sarabande" Spring 2007 - "Alexander-McQueen: Savage Beauty" at the Met [Photograph]. Flickr.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/28470639@N02/5637155386/in/photolist-9A8TUf-9DSACo-9A5Wz4-9A8Ubb-pZkVu-bBRXpP-bukD52-ih9Fp6-54AVfW-ih9uko-7V1hZG-7UX5j8-HTGeV-ihay1E-EYVLG-4ztsBn-JnHHS-56rsPY-7yzyY4-bPYTJD-7UX5bK-7UX5b6-7V1hYW-7UX5dD-7V1hQo/> Reprinted by permission of Winter Phoenix.

PART THREE

REPURPOSING

Photography as an Agent of Sustainable Change

Photographer and astronomer, Sir John Frederick William Herschel first discovered the cyanotype process, also referred to as the blueprint in 1842 (MacGee, 2012). Herschel's colleague and friend, botanist Anna Atkins, experimented with this newfound technique, making photogram cyanotypes of British algae, termed as "flowers of the sea" (Schaaf, 2016, para 4). Others in her field had strived for accurate representations of newly discovered plant matter in illustrated forms but could not truly depict the intricate details. As Atkins could place the botany directly onto the ferric ammonium citrate and potassium ferricyanide coated paper, secured with a glass plate to ensure the substance and paper were firmly pressed together, each feature was precisely imprinted in its true and factual representation. This process allowed Atkins to document varied species of foliage for inventory and scientific research (Ware, 2018). With these verbatim renderings, Atkins compiled around six thousand cyanotypes to produce *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions*, published in 1843 (Pollack, 2019). This publication is known as the very first photobook to ever be self-published and is one of the most highly regarded documentations of photographic history.

In *Photography's Antiquarian Avant-Garde: The New Wave In Old Processes*, Lyle Rexer (2002) reviews a radical phase beginning in the 1970's where photographers were "deliberately re-engaging the physical facts of photography, that is, its materials and processes, and turning to the history of photography for metaphors, technical insight, and visual inspiration" (p. 9). Contributing artists termed this way of working 'anti-photography' by pushing back on the constructed norms associated with this art form. Historically, each individual photographic process is assigned a specific outcome, with the intention that this approach cannot be explored within another medium. These revolutionaries disagreed with these limiting rules and started to experiment in an 'inter-media sphere', as characterised by critic, Klaus Honnef (Rexer, 2002). Rexer uses Bea Nettles as an example of this rebellion in the making. During the 1970's, she trialled the combination of photographs and paintings, using a sewing machine to stitch the juxtaposed compositions together. Her male counterparts looked down upon her which she suspected was due to her being a woman and bringing an innately feminine and domestic piece of machinery into the male dominated darkroom. The sewing machine had "distinctly art-less associations" (Rexer, 2002, p. 22) and therefore she and her innovative ideas were not welcomed. Nettles did not let this resistance derail her progress, instead she published a book called, *Breaking The Rules: A Photo Media*

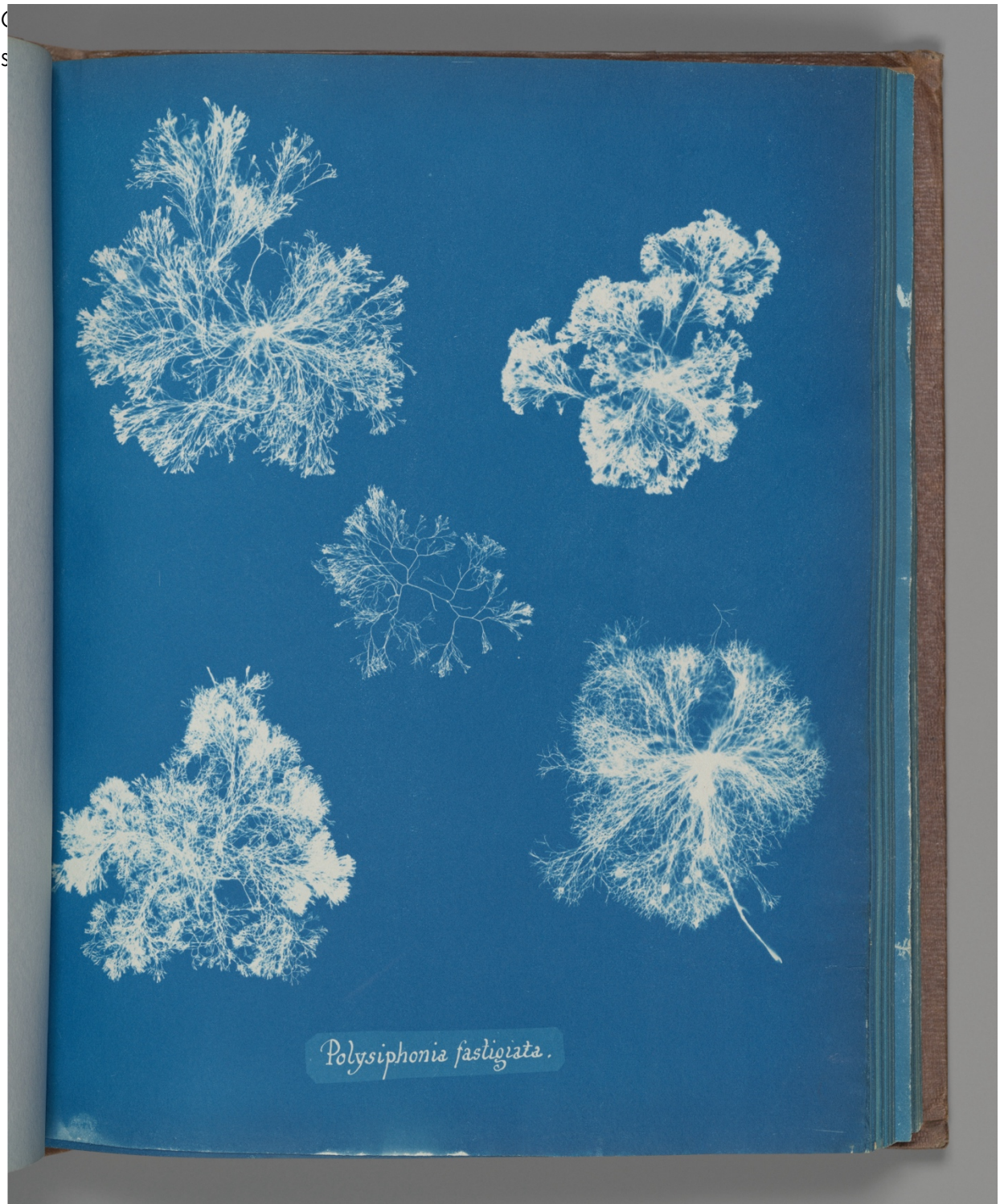


Figure 11. Atkins, A. (1853). *Polysiphonia fastigiata* [Cyanotype]. Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Met_DP-17302-050.jpg

Historic photographic processes have returned to prominence in recent years. Artists are referring to these practices to inform their making, adapting these methods with a contemporary viewpoint. Groups such as *The London Alternative Photography Collective* and *Alternative Process Academy* have facilitated online communities to share their knowledge and open space for artists to incorporate more sustainable approaches to their photographic practices. As part of their contribution, *The London Alternative Photography Collective* offer micro-residencies called 'Rework - Repurpose - Remove - Recycle', which enable practitioners to place a focus on making their analogue practice more environmentally friendly (Carr, 2020). The facilitators question the participants to think about their making's effects, such as the disposal of their chemicals, substitute ingredients for their solutions with an emphasis on using materials readily available to them. After attending a *Remove* micro-residency, Edd Carr, (2020) the Project Lead of *The Sustainable Darkroom* contemplated the impact of his making, realising that "unknowingly, you become gradually embedded in a material ecology of photography" (p. 98).

Similarly to Nettles' cross-contamination of practices, Carr uses the historic process of cyanotype, making hundreds of prints and transforming them into stop motion videos. To align with his pursuit of sustainable image making, Carr teamed up with DUST Magazine and London Fashion Week to create a video consisting of 440 cyanotype frames, edited into 38 seconds of footage to market sustainably conscious brand, Vivienne Westwood's Spring/Summer 2022 collection 'SOS' (Lomography & Carr, 2021). To represent climate change showcased in the collection, Carr used images of the sea, melting glaciers and marine life along with campaign imagery of the nautical inspired clothing. The blue of the cyanotypes prints aligned with the oceanic narrative as well as its output which notably uses the lowest toxic emulsion coating.

Other artists who engage with hybrid cyanotype artworks, with a fusion of cyanotype printed onto clothing, are photographic practitioners, Heidi Kirkpatrick and Angela Chalmers. In Kirkpatrick's series *Garments of Light*, she sun printed flowers and plants from her backyard in Oregon onto vintage domesticated clothing, including heirloom dresses, blouses and gloves. Kirkpatrick (2022) explains, "I really like working on existing materials, objects that have had a previous life" (as cited in Mitchell, para 2). Kirkpatrick's work explores femininity, history and family narratives, which are woven within her hand made processes and outcomes. The significance of the connection between the environment and the maker is prominent throughout Kirkpatrick's work. This method begins with haptic engagement of her immediate surroundings from

picking flora from her garden to considered placement of the matter onto hand coated item of clothing, allowing the summer sun to cast a unique print onto the garments, where they are then rinsed and hung to dry in her home darkroom studio.



Figure 12. Carr, E. (2021). *Vivienne Westwood SS22 - Cyanotype Animation* [Cyanotype Still retrieved from video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qUvc7fn9t6A> Reprinted by permission of Edd Carr.



Figure 13. Kirkpatrick, H. (2014). *Hope* [Photograph].

<https://www.heidirkpatrick.com/pages/garments-of-light-05.html> Reprinted by permission of Heidi Kirkpatrick.

Angela Chalmers is an alternative photographic visual artist whose work is centred around the process of cyanotypes, depicting ideas of memory, female identity and history. Chalmers participated in a local artist residency at St Martin-on-the-Hill Church in Scarborough in 2015. Her site-specific contribution consisted of a floral cyanotype dress, titled *Something About Mary*, acknowledging the founder of the church, Miss Mary Craven as well as the history of the enduring communion. The floral imprints of white lilies, commonly featured in Cathedral glass, were used for their association with the Virgin Mary and Pre-Raphaelite art (Chalmers, 2015). The style of the dress with its caged structure and high neckline, allude to the time of Craven's existence (1814 – 1889), embodying her spirit in a materialised representation. Chalmers also engages with the plant extracts she prints with to alter her cyanotypes appearance. In her *Wild Roses* series, she toned her prints with rose petals as they contain tannins which allow the blue to turn into varying hues of brown, beige, purple and even black. This series contributed to Annette Golaz's volume, *Cyanotype Toning: Using Botanicals to Tone Blueprints Naturally*.

Dressmaking: A Sustainable Ethos

In her book *Thrift to Fantasy: Home Textile Crafts of the 1930s - 1950s*, journalist and curator, Rosemary McLeod (2002) undertook extensive research into the social history of domesticity in New Zealand. To disseminate her groundwork analysis, McLeod sourced a varied collection of crafts which encompass Aotearoa's female identity, revealing stories and beliefs of the average kiwi woman, shown in the fragments of their handmade domestic art. Once married, women were confined to their abodes to run their households, making their children and husbands the centre of their worlds. Taking pride in making patchwork quilts, felted toys, smocked babies dresses and crocheted blankets, became a creative outlet as well as an escapism within the confinement of their homes. During and after World War II, families had to ration and conserve what they had. McLeod (2002) explains, "the women who came before us were expected to sew; they had to dress themselves and their families in a time when few people could afford to buy what they were capable of making" (p. 15).

In *Eco Fashion*, fashion activist Sass Brown discusses the rise in progressive growth of fashion brands integrating sustainable strategies into their design frameworks. In "Recycle, Reuse & Redesign", Brown (2010) acknowledges the evolution of redesigning unwearable garments and reconstructing them into innovative pieces, superior to their original appearance, in contrast to our grandparent's mindset of 'making do'. Brown's (2013) research is further examined in her second book, *Refashioned: Cutting-Edge*



Figure 14. Chalmers, A. (2015). *Something About Mary* [Photograph]
<https://www.angelachalmers.com/portfolio/mary-craven/> Reprinted by permission of Angela Chalmers.

Clothing From Upcycled Materials, celebrating designers working with used and unused materials. She explains that upcycling acknowledges the garments origin, the stories it holds and memories woven into the clothing we wear. By working with used materials and giving them another life, this postpones their entry into landfill, making this concept the quintessential essence of slow fashion (Brown, 2013).

Alison Gwilt (2014) outlines key sustainability issues from reconsidering design models to garment disposal, in her viable manual, *A Practical Guide to Sustainable Fashion*. In "Production", Gwilt (2014) reviews technical processes such as zero and minimal waste methodologies, made-to-measure and designing with minimal seams to use the cloth more efficiently, allowing for garments to be made with little to no excess fabric. These strategies are becoming more common within the industry as designers become acutely aware of the impacts of their making, progressing from traditional dressmaking blueprints, allowing for a reduction in textile waste and continual modifying of systems.

Emerging designer Talia Byre places a significant role on heritage and sustainability within her design language. The loss of her grandmother and several family members during the first COVID-19 lockdown prompted her inquisition into her ancestral roots. Her family ran a clothing store over four generations thus the making of her Spring/Summer 2021 collection became a way for Byre to continue her family's legacy (Yotka, 2020). Garments worn by her late grandmother in archival images became a visual source of inspiration as well as incorporating the colour red throughout the collection, referencing a childhood memory of her grandmother's boldly coloured carpet (Yotka, 2020). Byre sourced dead stock wool from Italy and a local mill as well as upcycling vintage sweaters and dying her fabrics with walnut husks (Murray, 2021). Similarly, Wellington based label Kowtow have recently released their second plastic free collection. All garments and infrastructure are made using 100% Fair Trade and Global Organic Textile Standard cotton, grown in Kolkata, India (Burns, 2019). In 2023, Kowtow published a *Plastic Free Handbook* to document their process, detailing accountable information about their certifications and suppliers. Buttons have been constructed using agoya and mussel shells as well as corozo nuts. The brand's objective is to create clothing "that can return to the earth without harm" (Kowtow, 2023, p. 24).

PART FOUR

PROCESSES

Methodology in the Making

Positioning the Project

During my Master of Design project, I drew from my two design disciplines: photography and fashion, with photography as the primary element. After graduating with a Design degree majoring in Photography, I have worked professionally as a photographer, primarily in fashion photography for the past 10 years. I studied Fashion papers during my degree, building on a strong fashion base gained throughout my secondary school education. I have integrated these design disciplines previously but wanted to expand upon these competencies within this project.

Many photographers such as Carolle Benitah, Jackie Mulder, Maurizio Anzeri and Laura Chen engage with memory and family history. They utilise archival family photographs and incorporate textile elements such as stitching into the photographs to represent 'loose threads' of memory, creating new meaning within their reconstructed works. As their images appeared to be similar renditions to each other, I developed my own way of engaging with the same ideas.

Alternative Photographic Processes Testing

Through research I became aware of many alternative photographic processes that I was interested in implementing. The beginning stages of my design process were very experimental, where I had to surrender to the process and embrace imperfections in how photographic solution, paper, film, light and subject matter would interact with each other to create unique and abstract imagery. Alongside experiments from other processes, my initial testing of lumen and phytogram prints, shown in figure 15 and 17 achieved pleasing results, therefore I decided to include these processes, along with my previous knowledge of cyanotypes.

It is important to this work to understand the processes utilised to create the abstract photographic imagery which became the textile design:

Cyanotype: One of the oldest types of light sensitive photographic prints which creates a blue and white image. A light sensitive emulsion of iron compounds (ferric ammonium citrate and potassium ferricyanide) is coated onto a substrate that will soak the solution (usually paper or fabric made from natural fibres). Once dry, an object or negative is placed on top, secured with a glass plate to ensure the two components are firmly forced together. It is placed in the sun or under a UV light where the shadow that the object or negative casts on the paper creates an image. The print is 'developed' in a

water bath to remove excess emulsion and then left to dry. Once dry the prints can be toned with various tannin solutions, many of which are environmentally friendly such as black tea, coffee or red wine. Cyanotypes have been used historically as blueprints for buildings.

Lumen Print: Black and white photographic paper which would normally be exposed in the darkroom is placed in the sun or under a UV light with an object or negative on top of it. Where the shadow cast by the object falls on the paper an image is created. Lumen prints can be fixed (like a traditional darkroom print) to preserve the image or left unfixed where the print will eventually fade. Importantly, lumen prints are different to photograms made in the darkroom because they are not chemically developed, therefore they appear as a variety of colours rather than black and white.

Phytogram: A newly developed process that uses the chemistry of plants and a photographic emulsion made of water, washing soda and vitamin C. Flowers and plant matter are immersed in the solution and then placed onto expired film or photographic paper. It is placed in the sun or under a UV light where the solution seeps into and onto the film or paper, creating an image often taking its form from the plants. Finally, it is rinsed in water, fixed and then left to dry.



Figure 15. McGill, R. (2023). *Lumen Print Test* [Photograph].



Figure 16. McGill, R. (2023). *Cyanotype Print Test* [Photograph].



Figure 17. McGill, R. (2023). *Phytogram Print Test* [Photograph].

Anecdotal Research

To use my grandmother's memories as the founding substance of the project, I made the decision to conduct semi-structured interviews with my Nana, as my only living source for gathering oral information. Reflecting on Davies and Renzenbrink's strategies of formulating metaphors from memories, I scrutinised which aspects of her stories I should abstract upon that would clearly depict the narrative I intended to portray. For four generations, the women in my family have engaged in sewing, knitting, crochet and gardening. Significant memories that were spoken about repeatedly included their efforts to produce magnificent gardens, the ritual of picking the first bud to display on the kitchen table, sewing new dresses to attend local dances and working in differing areas of the dressmaking trade. I revisited Davies' (2014) explanation in the chapter, "Drawing on Metaphor" where he details "metaphors may also exist within the artistic elements, lines, colours, and materials, and change can occur by attending to these elements" (p. 146). I began to think about how I could deploy this visually rich material and invent my own associated metaphors. This strategy allowed me to reference to my family without overtly showing their faces, which in turn makes the work more accessible to the viewer and provide an element of privacy for myself and my loved ones. I was able to consolidate the information into two categories and assign their role to the project; the flowers would become the photographic subject matter, and the dressmaking would be the output, which I would present in styled fashion photographs, strengthening the associated metaphors.

I determined the narrative would be centred around five generations of women from my maternal lineage: my great, great grandmother, known as *Little Gran*, my great grandmother, *Gladdy*, my grandmother, *Lynda*, my mother, *Robyn* and concluding with *myself*, as these were the people my grandmother spoke about with clarity and conviction. Each woman would be represented by a flower that linked to or was symbolic of her individual story. As the output would exist as a garment, I altered the expected perspective in that each of the five pieces would stand on their own and not sit as an interpretation or development of the other pieces. The intention for this project was not to make a full collection. The objective for the project is about developing a way to make a collection, accompanied by photographic outputs of the constructed amalgamated works.

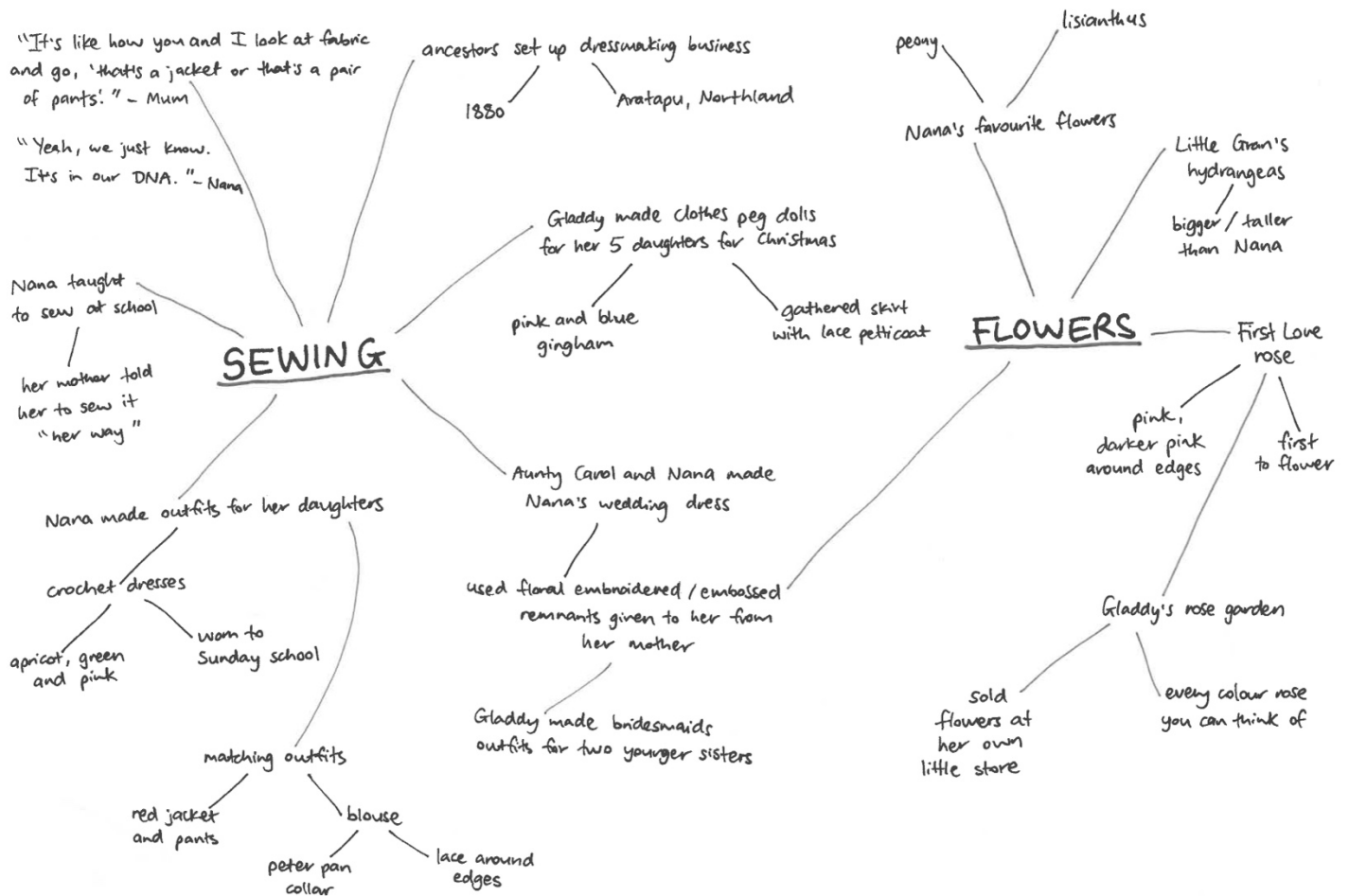


Figure 18. McGill, R. (2023). Themes from interviews Mind Map.

Printing Development

I then began deeper research of processes which would print photographic images onto fabric. I was aware that cyanotypes worked well on fabric where I could achieve a variation of colours by bleaching and toning the print, but I did not want to limit myself to these boundaries. I explored digital sublimation printing which allowed printing using the full spectrum of colours. Digital sublimation is a printing process that uses heat and pressure to sublimate ink from a digital inkjet print into synthetic fibres. I tested this method using the heat presses in the Textiles department at Massey to experiment with small samples. Once I had comprehended its capabilities, I worked with Digital Decor to print two larger lengths of fabric for two different garments.

Garment Design

Once the decisions of the narrative, photographic and printing processes were made for each piece, I began designing the garments. I faced challenges when I wanted to achieve specific silhouettes and techniques as I didn't want the print to be obstructed by seam lines or fabric manipulation. This enabled both my design and print ideas to integrate with my narrative. Employing minimal waste strategies helped avoid disruptions to the prints and align to my sustainable viewpoint of repurposing and reducing textile waste.

Building upon the Narrative

The following is a description of the conceptualisation and design process of each garment and photograph:

Little Gran (my great, great grandmother)

Little Gran had the real old-fashioned pink and blue hydrangeas. The bushes were huge. I don't think she ever pruned them back. When I was sixteen or seventeen, they were still bigger and taller than me. They were so spectacular. They used to just bloom and bloom and bloom. They were just beautiful (L. Lipsey, personal communication, September 25, 2023).

Interpretation

As Little Gran is the relative who feels the furthest away in terms of our timelines, I wanted to portray that dimension within the work. The flower used to represent her is the hydrangea. The skeletons of the hydrangea petals, the 'bones' of the flower, were to represent time and the fragility of life. To capture all the intricate detail in the delicate remains of the petal, I made lumen prints with expired photographic paper of a variety of different shaped petals. As shown in figure 19 the petal imagery created is the same size as the petals themselves, as the print is made by laying them directly onto the paper and laying them out in the sun.

Print Process

I scanned the print, enlarging each petal and made them into individual digital negatives, for printing cyanotypes. I made 200+ cyanotype prints on various sizes of scrap cotton and silk from my dead stock collection. I then bleached out the blue with baking soda and toned them in tea, coffee and wine baths to create different tones of brown and beige pigment. The faded colours represent age and faded memories.

Garment Construction

As described in the story, I wanted to emulate the grandeur of the hydrangea bush and sparsity of time. To achieve this voluminosity, I gathered 11 layers of dead stock tulle to make an underskirt. This foundation would sit under the bust to create an A-line silhouette. The sparsely placed petals were hand-stitched onto a tulle over dress with clusters of multi-coloured beads to portray a withering hydrangea bush. The side seams of the over dress were purposefully only sewn together from the underarm to bust, for the intention of opening the dress out into the set in the final image.



Figure 19. McGill, R. (2024). *Hydrangea Petals Lumen Print* [Photograph].



Figure 20. McGill, R. (2024). *Hydrangea Dress (front)* [Photograph].



Figure 21. McGill, R. (2024). *Hydrangea Dress (side)* [Photograph].

Fashion Image Formulation

I wanted to emphasise the widened structure and silhouette of this dress, so I added extra tulle, emerging from beneath the dress, adorned with florets of dried hydrangeas. I positioned myself in a low angle, using a wide-angle lens to distort the viewpoint and make the dress feel bigger, giving the viewer the same feeling my Nana felt, looking up at her grandmother's glorious hydrangea bushes. The blue backdrop depicts summer in the garden. The model has a content facial expression, looking down on the constructed flower arrangement emanating from her body, with comforting and gentle widespread arms.



Figure 22. McGill, R. (2024). *Little Gran Fashion Image* [Photograph].

Gladdy (my great grandmother)

She had roses all over the place in every colour that you could imagine. She was very proud of that rose garden. I remember one that was called First Love, a fairly long bud, sort of longer than any other rose. It was pink, darker pink around the outside edge and then lighter in the centre. That was always the first one to flower. I don't remember the names of the other roses but why I remember this First Love, I don't know. But it was a lovely bush and a lovely flower. It was always the first one to flower so we would know that spring had come, and summer was on the way when First Love flowered. The first bud out was always picked and put on the further end of the kitchen table (L. Lipsey, personal communication, October 10, 2023).

Interpretation

It was clear to me from the sentimental recollection, the rose represented Gladdy. From earlier testing, I knew that a lumen print would allow for a variation of information to be imprinted on the paper from the proportions of the roses not being flat. I made a lumen print with expired photographic paper of a bunch of seven roses, some buds and some which had bloomed.

Print Process

I scanned the lumen print, enlarged it and edited it so only five roses were present, to represent the five women. I altered the colours, so they were 'darker pink around the outside edge and then lighter in the centre' to resemble the predominant feature of the First Love rose. The areas around the roses were edited to a darker shade of purple. This design choice was made as the colour that represents Alzheimer's disease is purple. Gladdy was the first family member to be diagnosed and die from this condition. The combination of colours reflects her life from beginning to end.



Figure 23. McGill, R. (2023). *Rose Lumen Print* [Photograph].

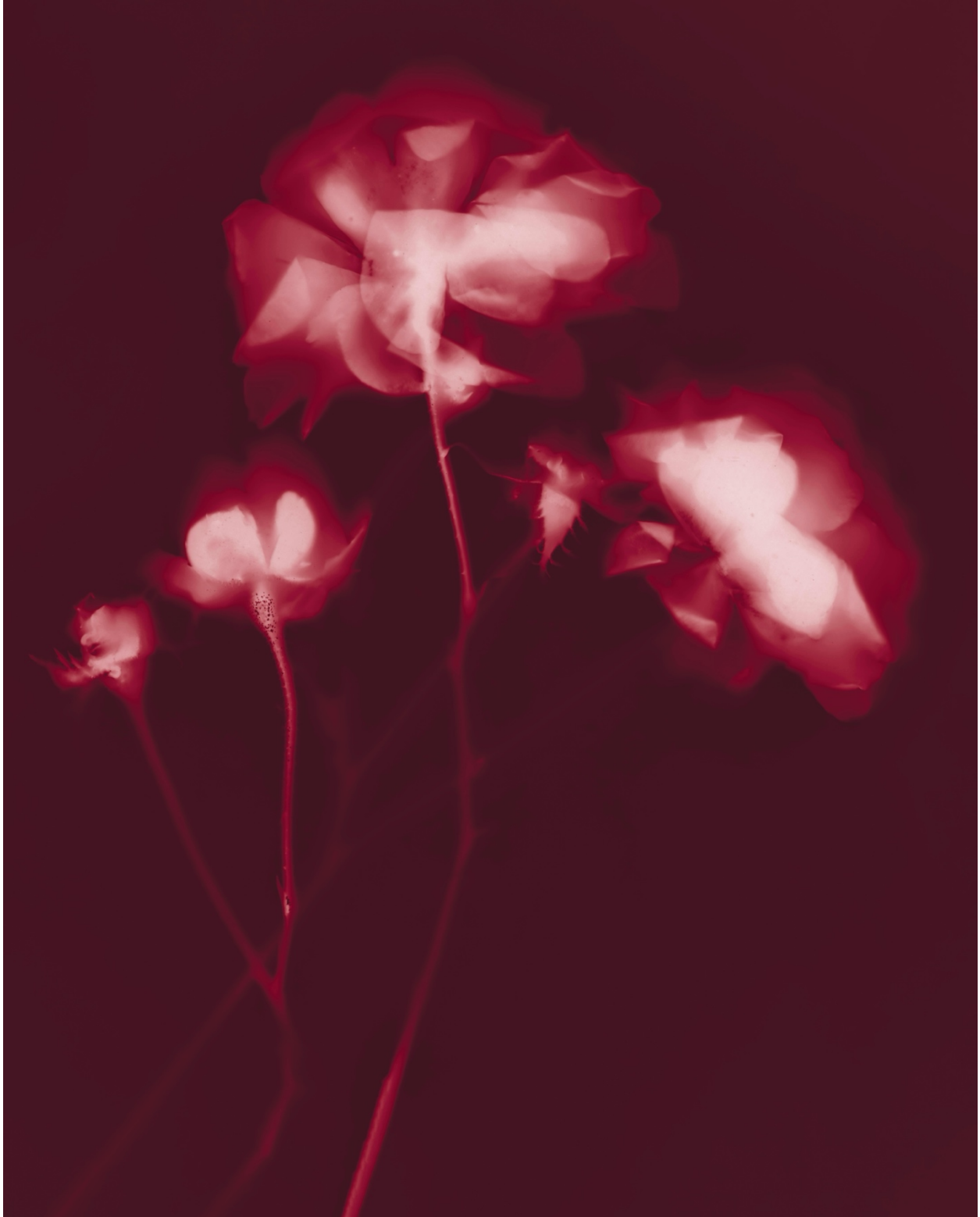


Figure 24. McGill, R. (2024). *Edited Rose Lumen Print* [Photograph].

Garment Construction

After Dad died, he didn't have a will, so we were under the jurisdiction of the Public Trust. We were making an okay go of the farm, but we didn't have any money to spare. Mum and Philly sat up late at night so us kids couldn't see, and they made us these beautiful dolls out of wooden pegs. They had a little knob on the top that was the face and the head and then there was just the straight body. There were two sort of things that could've done for legs where the peg was. They made these lovely dresses and petticoats. They were gingham. We each had a different colour. They were just a piece of material for the top and then they had a gathered skirt on them. So, it was just a piece of material that was wrapped around the peg and sewn at the top to form a shoulder, so it stuck out a little bit from the peg. I think there was a petticoat underneath that was sewn to the dress, to the material as well. That was just a bit of broderie anglaise. They made one for all of us and that year we got the doll and an orange, that was our Christmas present. We didn't suffer too much. No, we didn't know any better (L. Lipsey, personal communication, September 25, 2023).

The rose image was printed onto fabric using digital sublimation onto dead stock polyester. To reference Gladdy's timeline, I created a classic 1950's silhouette of a cinched in waist and flared skirt, also referencing the shape of the doll's dresses. I intentionally restrained any cutting into the fabric to avoid disrupting the floral print and to reduce fabric waste. To achieve the fitted waistline, I stitched elastic casing to the waist area to transform the single piece of fabric into an hourglass silhouette. The dress was sewn together at the side seams and the bodice was boned to create structure around the bust. To join the bodice together, I used clothes pegs to hold the shoulder seams together as both a functional and aesthetic detail, referencing the clothes pegs dolls.



Figure 25. McGill, R. (2024). *Rose Dress (front)* [Photograph].



Figure 26. McGill, R. (2024). *Rose Dress (bodice)* [Photograph].



Figure 27. McGill, R. (2024). *Rose Dress (peg)* [Photograph].

Fashion Image Formulation

I can remember, Mum was very sad one morning and we asked her what was wrong, and she said, 'I've got to go to the Public Trust and get some money for you kids for shoes for school'. So, everything that she needed money for, she had to go and beg from the Public Trust for them to release money. I can remember going to school with no shoes when it was icy, cold and the puddles were frozen (L. Lipsey, personal communication, September 25, 2023).

To elaborate on Gladdy's story, the sadder parts of her life are explored within this image. Branches were used to construct a set, emulating a rose bush, with the intention of the model being trapped within it. The concept of feeling confined links to her struggles following her husband's death by drowning and having to take over the farm while supporting her five daughters by herself. The idea of entrapment is interpreted by Alzheimer's as my great grandmother was the first of my family lineage to be diagnosed with this disease. The model is bare foot to reference the children going to school wearing no shoes with a distressed expression and outreached arms, trying to escape.



Figure 28. McGill, R. (2024). *Gladdy Fashion Image* [Photograph].

Lynda (my grandmother)

My favourite flower is peony. I've never ever grown them because they don't grow in the north island, they only grow in the cold in the south island. My second favourite would be a lisianthus. But I've never grown them either. I like all flowers, you know me. But my very, very favourite is a peony. I think they're beautiful right from their bud, right til they drop their petals and die (L. Lipsey, personal communication, October 10, 2023).

Interpretation

Finding seasonal flowers was a challenge at various stages of the project. As a result, I used a lisianthus, my Nana's second favourite flower, to represent her. This piece is centred around the effects of Alzheimer's, translated visually through the portrayal of the flower. In Greek, lisianthus translates to dissolving flower. *Lysis* meaning dissolution and *anthos* meaning flower, a metaphor for fading and loss of memory, linking to the dominant symptoms of Alzheimer's. I created a phytogram print as from initial testing of this process, the imprint was impressionistic and distorted, linking to the ambiguity of memories.

Print Process

The phytogram images were made using expired medium format film which come in 6cm wide strips. I cut the film in five lengths and exposed each using the flowers soaked in the phytogram solution which also develops the film. I scanned the film and drastically enlarged it, to represent the significant effect Alzheimer's has had on her life. I edited the colours to varying shades of purple to represent Alzheimer's. By utilising the width of the dead stock polyester, I was able to mirror the print, giving me a seven-metre length of digital sublimated print on the fabric.

Garment Construction

The phytogram print informed the garment design as well as my intentions for the final image. To create an elongated train to again, visually represent the scale and spread of Alzheimer's disease, and to avoid disrupting the print, I joined the length of fabric together at the centre back seam. The bodice was joined at the neck to create a halter, fastened with a tie. To utilise all the fabric with no excess waste, I constructed a boned neck piece out of the one metre test strip, emulating a blooming flower.

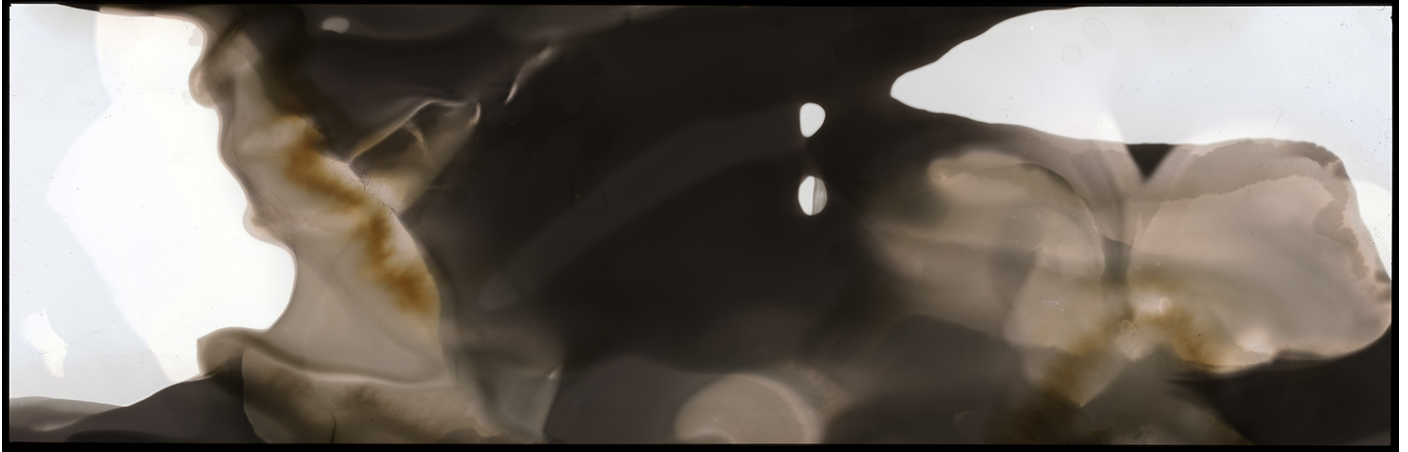


Figure 29. McGill, R. (2024). *Lisianthus Phytogram Print* [Photograph]

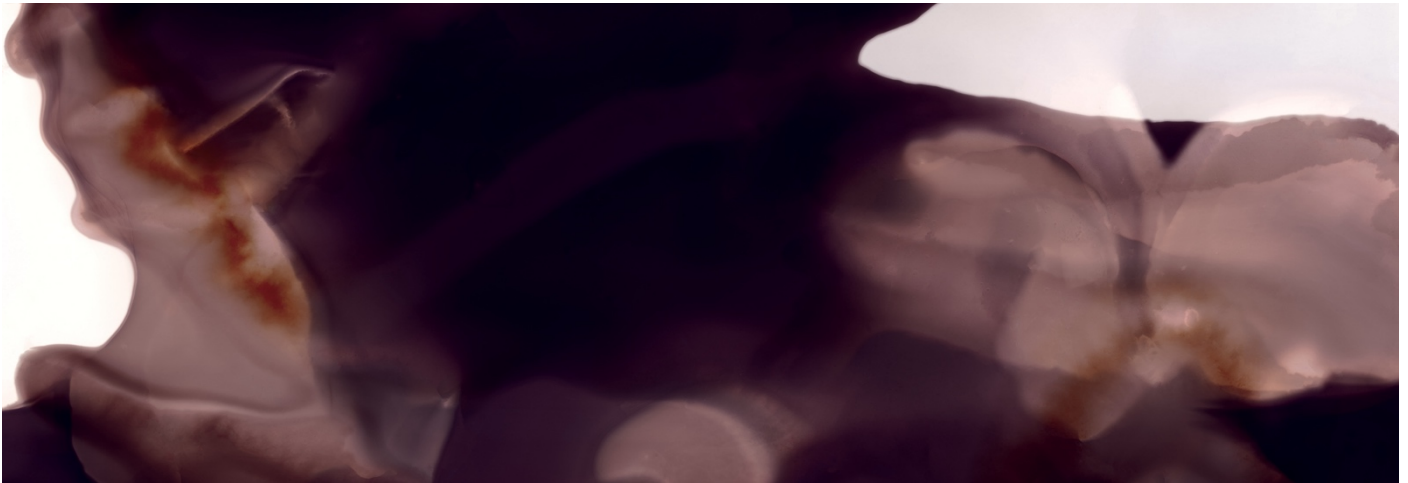


Figure 30. McGill, R. (2024). *Edited Lisianthus Phytogram Print* [Photograph].



Figure 31. McGill, R. (2024). *Mirrored Lisianthus Phytogram Print* [Photograph].



Figure 32. McGill, R. (2024). *Lisianthus Dress (front)* [Photograph].



Figure 33. McGill, R. (2024). *Lisianthus Dress (side)* [Photograph].



Figure 34. McGill, R. (2024). *Lisianthus Dress (head piece)* [Photograph].



Figure 35. McGill, R. (2024). *Lisianthus Dress (head piece side)* [Photograph].



Figure 36. McGill, R. (2024). *Lisianthus Dress (back)* [Photograph].

Fashion Image Formulation

This image also represents struggles and tragedy. To achieve the perception of water, I placed an iridescent film over the lights to project an ethereal gradient of blue and purple across the white studio walls. The model is perceived to be floating in water, with her arms falling back, a foot in the air with the train of the dress in motion behind her. The water theme also links to the definition of the lisianthus flower, a dissolving flower. The fluidity in the dress links to my perception of memories in that they vanish and reappear, like a rhythmic movement of water.



Figure 37. McGill, R. (2024). *Nana Fashion Image* [Photograph].

Robyn (my mother)

Because my Mum ran the haberdashery department at Allied Farmers, she was able to source a fabric sample from overseas. It was a piece that had embossed and embroidered flowers on it. We couldn't make a whole dress out of it, so we made the top and the sleeves out of this sample (L. Lipsey, personal communication, October 10, 2023).

Interpretation

This piece represents both my Nana and mother. When my grandmother got married at the age of twenty-one in 1963, she was pregnant with my mother, which was frowned upon at the time. My Nana kept her wedding dress, which she made with her older sister. They worked with what they had available; in the same way I've approached the making of the garments in this project. It was important to use this garment in its current state rather than try and recreate it as the dress bore so much significance. On my journey of discovering different flower species, I found a dahlia called *Linda's Baby*. Lynda is my grandmother's name; therefore, Lynda's baby is my Mum. I sourced a bouquet of this type of dahlia, just before they were out of season and let them begin their process of dying. I intentionally allowed the flowers to wilt to show their beauty in a decaying form.

Print Process

Until this point in the project, all the images I made were camera-less, aligning to my sustainable viewpoint in the processes I used. To continue this in another way, I took physical film photographs, repurposing expired medium format film. I photographed the stems individually and then edited them into a group of three, to represent my mother and her two sisters, all of Lynda's babies.

Fashion Image Formulation

The combination of the dahlia image and symbolism associated with the wedding dress are fundamental to communicate this narrative. To convey the illusion of fading memories, I projected the image of the three dahlias onto the wedding dress, worn by my mother. Using the projection was a different way of transforming a textile by imposing an image onto it. My mother's head is tilted downwards, alluding to the shame my Nana felt from conceiving a child before she was married. The stance also implies to her viewpoint of her womb, where my mother was growing when my Nana last wore this gown.



Figure 38. Lipsey Family Archive. (1963). Lynda on her wedding day [Photograph].



Figure 39. McGill, R. (2024). *Three Linda's Baby Dahlias* [Photograph].



Figure 40. McGill, R. (2024). *Mum Fashion Image* [Photograph].

Myself

Interpretation

The very starting point of my research began with analysing my father's family tree, tracing back to my ancestors who resided in Ayrshire, Scotland in the early 1800's from ancestral records handed down to me. When studying dates, names, lists of relatives and their movements, leading them to settle in New Zealand, I was looking for hidden pieces of information that would prompt inspiration. I discovered a book from 1955 called *The Flowerers: The Story of Ayrshire Needlework*. Dating back to the early 1830's, wives and daughters who resided in the small county of Ayrshire, Scotland took up floral white needlework as Scotland's solution to costly lace imports (Troup, 2021). The delicate embroidery adorned white muslin and cotton christening gowns, baby's caps, edgings on women's dresses and collars (Swain, 1955). "The chief beauty and characteristic feature of the finest pieces of Ayrshire embroidery left to us today lies in the contrast and variety of the point lace fillings" (Swain, 1955, pg. 43). This technique was referred to as *flowering* and spoken as 'flooerin' by the Scottish seamstresses (Swain, 1955). The fine art did not withstand time as developments of modernised machinery and international demands from the Industrial Revolution left the Flowerers unable to continue their uniquely handmade contributions to the craft (Troup, 2021).

One of my observations when looking into my paternal genealogy was the limited information regarding my female descendants. I reached for Langford's (2007) hypothesis and had to imagine "what might have been" (p. 16). I constructed my own truth that the McGill women were Flowerers, allowing me to reference their existence. The name also inspired the title of this body of work. The decision to not include my paternal lineage felt more realistic as I was in possession of more information from my maternal side of the family. I still wanted to reference them, but they would play a less significant role in the project.



Figure 41. Ayrshire Needlework. (n.d). 1a. *Christening Robe* [This baby robe is thought to be the best example of Ayrshire Needlework embroidery that East Ayrshire Council has in its collection. The exquisite embroidery covers the entire apron, skirt wings, sleeves and bodice.]. Future Museum.

<https://www.futuremuseum.co.uk/collections/features/online-exhibitions/the-art-of-ayrshire-needlework/1a-christening-robe> Reprinted by permission of East Ayrshire Leisure and East Ayrshire Council.

Garment Construction

The ideation for this piece contrasts with the previous garments as there is not a narrative formulated from a past event or story. As this piece represents me, I wanted to integrate both sides of my family, my equal make up. I used a dead stock floral lace to connect to my paternal ancestors, *The Flowerers* and their floral embroidery. I made a suit to represent my style which is more contemporary and androgynous, aligning with current fashion, contrasting with the more feminine looks created for the other pieces. The lace has been dyed black to remove the bridal language associated with white lace. I adapted block patterns to create minimal seams to lessen disruptions to the lace embroidery and utilise the fabric economically. I purposefully cut out the garment pieces to utilise the scalloped fabric edging, featured on the hem edges of the jacket and trousers. I stitched the excess fabric pieces scraps onto the edge of the jacket sleeves and around the neckline, linking my resourceful process to my maternal lineage in the making of this piece.

Fashion Image Formulation

This image represents the future, by looking back to move forward. Butterflies and flowers have a symbiotic relationship where they contribute to each other's life cycles. The butterfly wing configurations connect to the construction of the lace. Fine lines, intertwined together to create an intricate web of beauty. As butterflies' metamorphosis from chrysalis to butterfly, the process of changing the white lace to black was transformative. I interpret this symbolically as the butterflies depict my ancestors, looking over me and guiding me into the next stage of my life. I have inherited their knowledge and genes; therefore, they will always be a part of me. The butterflies are displayed as flying around me and off into the distance. I am leaping up to follow them where one lands on my hand. A gentle gesture that their spirit will always be with me.



Figure 42. McGill, R. (2024). *Lace Suit (front)* [Photograph].



Figure 43. McGill, R. (2024). *Lace Suit (jacket)* [Photograph].



Figure 44. McGill, R. (2024). *Lace Suit (sleeve)* [Photograph].



Figure 45. McGill, R. (2024). *My Fashion Image* [Photograph].

Presentation

My intention for presenting the work is to have the garments displayed on mannequins with the fashion images printed at large scale, exhibited on white walls. I have chosen to print the images on Hahnemühle Photo Rag which is a white cotton paper, acid and lignin-free. This choice aligns to my sustainable mindset as it contains more environmentally friendly composites.

The images will be carefully stored digitally, accessible to be reprinted for future generations. The garments will be stored safely to preserve their longevity.

CONCLUSION

The Flowerers has enabled lost memories to resurface through my creative process as multidisciplinary works. The outcome has been developed through an unconventional process where photography and fashion combine, expanding upon my previous capabilities and gaining knowledge through my practice-led design approach. In this legacy project, the garments and conceptualised fashion images act as informative records, validating their existence as tangible keepsakes which can be passed onto future generations, sustaining family legacies. The making of the work allowed me to reach an acceptance of my grief and reposition my bereavement into a meaningful project.

From semi-structured interviews with my grandmother and research into remedial techniques aiding people suffering from loss, I was able to formulate symbolic metaphors to convey my relatives' narratives. Expanding upon existing skills in alternative photographic processes, I have broadened my understanding of historic techniques through experimentation. This granted an arbitrary approach to my image making, providing a separation from the people to their depictions, allowing me to participate within my chosen themes in a new way from other work I had examined.

Insight gained from the interviews with my grandmother influenced my methodologies, for example, repurposing to provide for their families led me to upcycling materials in both fashion and photography outputs throughout this project. *The Flowerers* responds to present-day concerns; design theories which enable sustainable solutions were examined along with other artists and designers. With multiple underlying repercussions in the production practices and methods of both fashion and photography, I embraced sustainable strategies to lessen their impact. To produce the figurative manifestations depicting the chosen narration of each of the women in this study, I examined how story telling is portrayed within fashion and fashion photography. This informed how I consolidated all the elements from my newly developed process to contextualise the intricate characteristics communicated within the stories.

Throughout the making of this project, I was able to reflect on the process I developed and how it is situated within the photography and fashion industries. From extensive research into the concepts integrated within the project, my research and output are a newfound contribution to these areas of design. My intention for the viewer is to prompt conversations, enabling rediscoveries of family histories, in the hopes that sharing of these philosophies may preserve ancestral legacy as well as illustrating a method to process grief through the integration of mourning and making.

Going forward, I intend to continue working with alternative photographic processes by having the privilege of engaging with historic processes in a contemporary and sustainable context. I aspire to continue developing my process and to make meaningful work within this unique framework of combined practice. I plan to proceed with my inquisition of learning about my family heritage to inform my practice as well as holding the responsibility of contributing and sustaining my family legacy.

I have gained a profound understanding of my own identity whilst working through challenging topics within the project. I have realised that I act, think and create in similar ways to my maternal bloodline, which has given me a heartfelt understanding of who I am. Although I was unable to meet some of these women, creating *The Flowerers* enabled me to interact with each of them. I found this process to be cathartic, stimulating and tremendously rewarding. I have grown immensely throughout this year and have expanded upon of my skill level as a multidisciplinary creative.



Figure 46. Lipsey, R. (2024). *Behind the scenes* [Photograph].

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Figure 47. McGill, R. (2023). *Researching McQueen* [Photograph].

APPENDIX

Ethical considerations were adhered to in this research. I have read the Massey University Code of Conduct and discussed my project's ethics with my supervisors. For the people modelling in my fashion editorial shoots, I have provided them with a model release form as they are appearing as a 'model' and not themselves, except for my mother and me. I obtained written consent from my grandmother prior to the interviews, and from my mother prior to photographing her. The consent form explained the purpose of the interviews, how they would be used, where they would be published and how they will be safely stored into the future. After further discussions with my supervisors, we have deemed the project to be ethically low risk.