

PEARL

by:

Dylan Lewis

B.A., Virginia Commonwealth University, 2018

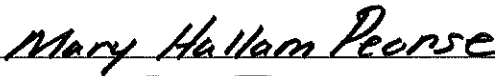
A Report Submitted to the Lamar Dodd School of Art of the University of Georgia in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Athens, Georgia

2024

Approved:



Major Professor

Date:



I bought my first sewing machine in summer of 2020, as so many others did. This was in Richmond, Virginia, where I'm from. The company I worked for had just folded and I suddenly found myself with time in need of filling. I had no special relationship to clothes or textiles; I dressed the same almost every day, like a cartoon character. When I got dressed I would think about anonymity more than anything. If I wanted my clothes to express anything, it was a mute stare, revealing nothing.

Months later, I moved to Baltimore for a new job. It was winter now. Winter in Baltimore is essentially an eraser; the ground and the sky and the buildings all look the same. I knew no one and I would take long walks around the ancient park next to my apartment, always somehow wet, pinging around unmoored like a balloon cut off its string.

I was in love, though. In a way I had previously thought myself incapable. Urgent, feral, like something vestigial inside of me had apprehended its former shape in another. I think I lost my mind a little bit. She would come up from Richmond on the weekends, or I would go back. My life which seemed so diffuse would condense around these weekends, given form. I was working ten hour days in a photo studio putting socks on a plastic foot. I clung hard to what we were making together, like a buoy. I stomped in puddles all the way home.

She was trying to become a welder, at least at that time. She was going through that period where you realize you have to become something other than just yourself, and throwing herself at the problem the way she threw herself at everything, with a boundless energy and openness, trying on different passions like a tourist or a boy on a first date. This one seemed like it was sticking though - she was working in a forge, apprenticing under someone, the whole thing. I was proud and excited for her.

I decided I would make her a shirt for her birthday. A real hardy workshirt, heavy denim, meant to really thrash. I had done some tentative alterations to my own clothes, but had never tried making something from scratch, using a pattern. It felt like a grand expression of devotion

- this thing that would surely take me weeks to make, that would require me learning an entirely new set of skills, all in the service of making something she could wear for years, something she could learn and work and live in. I had a real sense of the hours I spent working on it somehow imbuing themselves in the fabric, like the shirt itself *contained* the time that went into it. There seemed to me such an obvious intimacy in shaping the collar which would rest against her neck, in stitching the yoke that would drape from her shoulder blades. It seemed entirely possible to me that she would be able to actually *feel* my hand in the seams. It took me around 40 hours and ended up two sizes too big, but she seemed to love it anyway.

Around two months after this, the relationship ended suddenly, explosively. I sat dazed in the blast zone for months. She never became a welder; the last time I looked at her instagram she was modeling wedding dresses in Greece. I'm not sure what became of the shirt. But of course it still *lives*.



First shirt, cotton selvedge denim, 2020.

I struggled with whether or not this remains in any way significant to my art practice. It's certainly not inevitable that the emotional context under which one first learns a skill remains relevant as that skill progresses, expands, becomes a 'practice'. But I do think I intuited

something in that first shirt that's stayed with me ever since: fabric can *hold* things. It can remember and contain; it can change, grow, decay. It can, in a sense, *live*. All of my work since I began making clothes has been a continuing exploration of this concept. Is it possible to *imbue* fabrics with qualities from other substances? This question has a long historical trajectory - the concept of 'enchanted' fabrics has existed since antiquity. But I'm less interested in historical conceptions of fabric's spiritual or phenomenological permeability than I am in simply taking that fact (fabric's capacity to contain) at face value, as a given, and proceeding from there - how then can I use this capacity to further the experience one can have with garments? Furthermore, how can this combine with other expressive qualities of clothes (silhouette, texture, drape, movement, details) to build a cohesive emotional landscape around the garments? My work engages with these questions primarily through discrete collections of garments, each loosely centered a specific 'world' (the scare quotes feel necessary because it's less a concrete, physical world than it is a poem-world, or narrative, or simply a set of feelings).

It first feels necessary to erect some scaffolding around the space we're in, specifically the relationship between garments and the nonspecific umbrella term 'art'. Historically, the distinction between 'ready to wear' clothing and 'haute couture' clothing has delineated the boundary between commerce and art - i.e. ready to wear is primarily commercial, meant to be reproduced in an 'open edition', so to speak, whose function is for everyday wear - whereas haute couture is the province of more sculptural, one-off pieces, designed by an individual in a gesture expressive of the maker's vision, meant only to be worn as *presentation*, i.e. a runway or gallery show. Walter Benjamin's seminal 1935 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" provides some interesting nodes of analysis here: "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence" (3). In Benjamin's formulation, ready to wear pieces (by their nature reproductions of an original) are

divorced from the realm of context that makes a work of art a singular, discrete phenomenon - something that possesses an individual 'aura', as he names it. Reproductions dilute the original art object's aura: "One might subsume the eliminated element in the term "aura" and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence" (4). So what is the status of a ready to wear garment? Can it be considered an art object if it exists to be reproduced? What if it was never reproduced, would it then somehow be granted a level of art-ness? I pose these questions rhetorically because I do not believe they are in any sense truly answerable, nor am I even that concerned with what an answer might be. Rather, I am interested in what happens when a garment that could easily pass as a traditional ready to wear garment on first glance is ideated, created, and presented with the same conceptual, processual, and emotional context that a painting or a poem might be, in the hopes that this animates the garments - makes them feel *alive*.

This desire often manifests most visibly in construction details. I don't seek to hide or disguise any moments of construction - on the contrary, I really enjoy when a garment features moments in which the hand of the maker reveals itself, whether through a wobbly stitch, or an exposed seam, or even what, in the context of a garment making factory, would be considered 'mistakes'. There is a line here, between sloppiness and intentionality, that I really enjoy sidling up as close to as possible. There is always the danger of tipping too far in the direction of valorizing mistakes, process, etc. - of truly just engaging in sloppy craft - but much like the Supreme Court's definition of pornography, I know it when I see it. I want the final garment to include evidence of its own making, rather than, as so many clothes nowadays do, endeavoring to appear as a perfectly inert and unmade object springing directly and mysteriously into existence in the manner of so many industrial goods. Each place where the labor behind the garment makes itself visible is meant to serve as a small meditation on labor

itself - what it takes to make something, the time and knowledge and hand habits contained within each seam.



Details, Curved Pleat Trousers, wool suiting (left), linen canvas (right), 2021.

There are also details whose purpose is expressive of something else, a vaguely nebulous concept that Italians refer to as ‘sprezzatura’, and that Japanese expresses as ‘shibusa’ - though there is undoubtedly cultural specificity to both of these words, they can be broadly defined as a sort of ‘studied carelessness’ - a kind of natural, organic unkemptness that retains a sense of elegance or purpose; a balance between elements feeling put-together and under control, and yet also intimately connected to a natural state of entropy ambiently present as one moves through the world. Clothing feels particularly adept at expressing this concept; fabric wrinkles as its worn, collars sag or fall askew. Sprezzatura points to why we often find these moments of imperfection appealing - there’s a kind of louche lack of pretense or artifice in a perfectly faded or wrinkled garment, a feeling of the thing having been lived-in, and having itself lived. Unlike traditional collared shirts by other makers, I choose not to line or

use any kind of stiffener or interfacing in my collars. This means that they are exposed to whatever the environment wills - they will not stand artificially in conditions hostile to an upright collar. Similarly, there are no linings or interfacings anywhere in the garment, nothing to distract or conceal the complete and unified 'thing-ness' of the fabric and garment. In practice, this means that after a day of wear, the shirt will have responded to the wearer's environment in much the same way the wearer themselves will have.



Collar, Painter's Shirt, raw silk, 2022.



Two year old Painter's Shirt, linen, 2022.

-

The evolution from “I want to dress like a blank stare” to trying to express myself via making clothes was primarily spurred by two separate explorations - first, discovering designers from the 80s and 90s, primarily from Antwerp and Japan, working in a way that felt

totally gestural and mysterious and unique - and second, working with more and different types of fabric myself, both in terms of fiber content and weave.

A major turning point was discovering the work of Rei Kawakubo, the creator and designer behind the label Comme des Garçons. Her output, particularly in the 80s and early 90s, completely redefined for me the concept of what clothes can communicate and, perhaps more importantly, refuse to communicate. She mostly works in shades of black and grey, often working with oversized silhouettes and flowing, voluminous fabric. Her figures seemed always to be rising from a mist; the sinuousness of the fabric seemed almost dismissive of the model's bodies, without any regard for their shape, as if it behaved on its own, almost supra-human, or perhaps existing in the space that the artist and musician Phil Elverum refers to as 'beneath the human'. It seemed to me what the garments communicated more than anything was a refusal of context - the archetypes the clothes might have suggested, the situations in which you could imagine them existing, seemed entirely mysterious and new, as if Kawakubo was gesturing toward an idea of adornment more geared toward cultivating mystery than fashioning identity.



Comme des Garçons Fall '92 show. Photo: Condé Nast Archive.

Concurrent with discovering Kawakubo and CDG was discovering the work of the Antwerp 6, a group of young avant-garde designers coming out of the underground fashion scene in early 80s Belgium, and specifically the work of Martin Margiela, an 'unofficial' member of the Antwerp group. More than the garments themselves, the thing that most moved me about Margiela's early work was his total disdain for the contemporary fashion landscape, and his desire to move the garments he made outside of that realm and into a more spontaneous, DIY, anarchic-spirited practice of deconstruction and discovery. His early runway shows are legendary for their refusal to conform to the standards dictated by the fashion establishment at the time - most runway shows by the big houses of the time were incredibly formal, rigid affairs, rather like an awards banquet. Margiela instead would often street cast his shows and stage them at venues that almost seemed to be chosen at random - his Spring/Summer 1990 show was held at an outdoor playground in a lower-income neighborhood on the outskirts of Paris. Children from the neighborhood who typically played on the playground in the afternoons crashed the show, with Margiela's encouragement, walking alongside the models on the catwalk, jumping on and off of various surfaces. In later shows, the models would wear full-face veils and stomp almost haphazardly around whatever path had been laid out for them. The spirit seemed much closer to a 'happening' or a performance piece than to a fashion show. This spirit would carry through much of Margiela's collections throughout the 90s.



Martin Margiela's Spring/Summer 1990 collection in Paris. Photo: Jean-Claude Coutausse

Another turning point in my practice, although one that took place gradually, was beginning to work with different kinds of natural fibers beyond cotton, which, as the dominant fiber in the US, is often the entry point for sewists. As an aside, there will be no discussion of synthetic fibers in this thesis because I have no interest in using synthetic fibers. The manufacture of synthetic fibers achieves a level of surface consistency that natural fibers can't achieve, which seems to me totally divorced from the true nature of a dynamic, entropic existence. They feel dead and lifeless in my hands, so the central explorations of my work do not apply to them.

Quite soon into my fabric explorations I began to intuit the different personalities of the various fibers (cotton, linen, hemp, silk, and wool) and to use them accordingly; these intuitions could deepen and change over time, leading me from one to another and back again. The denim I used for the first shirt I made, which at the time had struck me as honest and ruggedly plainspoken, came to seem to me a dumb, glassy-eyed fabric, lumbering and servile, when thrown into relief by, for instance, the mercurial escapability, the preening dissimulation of a raw silk. I sketched out a pseudo-cosmology in my head about the origins of different fibers, or of the elements they primarily mimic - the air fabrics are linen and hemp, the water fabrics are wool and silk, and the earth fabric is cotton. If I wanted a garment to feel expressive of a particular element, I had paths to follow. This could combine with silhouette - a shirt made from a watery fabric that clings to the body can give the impression of rivulets and channels in the cloth that form and morph like a geologic time lapse as the body beneath moves - whereas a more voluminous silhouette can make the cloth ripple and flow around the body like a roiling sea. A syntax was forming, a language with its own parts of speech, each able to be harnessed and manipulated to make visible a feeling the body is having.

The first body of work that I made during my time at the Dodd that felt like a successful exploration of my interest in manipulating fabric for expressive purposes was a collection of garments based around two looks I called the Lava Suit and the Moon Suit. Both were attempts to make garments that seemed to embody natural forms and materials - in this case, lava, volcanic processes, and the surface of the moon.



Lava Suit and Moon Suit, 2022.

The germ of the idea for this work was discovering the lives and work of Maurice and Katia Krafft, two volcanologists who were also married. They came up in the 1970s, and made numerous films together documenting eruptions, getting closer to the source than any other volcanologists, often camping on the caldera of continuously erupting volcanoes. I watched a film documenting their story during a particularly vulnerable time, when I felt certain of the impossibility of any two people ever truly reconciling themselves to one another. I was immensely moved by the simplicity, and seeming inevitability, of their love for each other - it seemed no different than their love for volcanoes, a devotion that felt preternatural, like it had

lived in each of them forever, lying dormant until time and circumstance brought them together. On June 3rd, 1991, they died in an eruption on Mount Unzen in Japan, their bodies found side by side under a sheet of pyroclastic ash. At the time, delirious with longing, I thought it was the most romantic thing I could possibly imagine. When you find what you love, you let it destroy you.

For weeks after seeing the film, I couldn't stop thinking about volcanoes. I made hypothetical travel itineraries for trips to visit eruptions, bought any lava rocks I could find online, read dense, incomprehensible (to me) geologic reports from areas of volcanic activity. It felt like a kind of avatar for romantic longing - this slow, hidden churning that moves vast quantities of energy underneath our feet, rearranging landscapes. And also, it can kill you.

I began thinking of how I could imbue fabric and silhouette with the quality of natural, wild phenomena - volcanic activity, geologic time, rock formation, wind and electricity and physical currents we cannot see. For the fabric of the lava suit, I first took a bolt of raw brick red denim fabric and repeatedly threw a lava rock (from Krakatau in Indonesia) at it, which had the effect of leaving marks in the fabric where the rock (which is highly abrasive) struck. Then I took the fabric and bunched it up randomly and abraded it by hand with another lava rock. Then I washed the fabric down until it was left with distressing and striation left by the lava rock. Because the fabric is a brick red, when combined with the distressing it has the look of a weathered red rock, or of a dusky landscape with rivers of lava moving through it. Also, knowing the process the fabric went through, when I touch it or sew with it or wear a garment made from it, I have the distinct awareness of the contact it has had with actual lava, with once molten rock that rose from beneath the earth's surface, on a journey that possibly took thousands of years - of the inconceivably numerous amount of individual processes, movements, gradations, etc., as well as the vast geologic time scale over which these processes took place, which brought that rock into my hands and into contact with the fabric. In this way the cloth, and the garments made from it, embody a kind of alchemical relationship to lava and volcanic activity.



Lava rocks and lava buttons, 2022.

I also fashioned the buttons for the lava suit blazer from actual lava rock - I first shaved them into something resembling a button shape using a diamond tipped blade, and then drilled buttonholes in them.

This ultimately felt like the first time I had succeeded in sublimating fabric into something else, something that felt inclusive of other forces, other forms. An interest in continuing to explore this phenomenon is what led to the work in the thesis show, called *Pearl*.

In the summer of 2023 I found myself once again in the blast zone, reeling from loss and an increasingly acute sense of how that experience (of loss, of the particular kind of longing lining grief) has seemed to structure so much of my life. As I often do when I find myself in this state, I returned to the work of Anne Carson, one of my favorite writers. The title of a poem of hers I had never before encountered stuck out to me, from *The Beauty of the Husband*: “And kneeling at the edge of the transparent sea, I shall shape for myself a new heart from salt and mud.” Immediately, I could almost *feel* the many loose ends of the many threads I had been tugging on, outside of my work, just in my life - what is unchangeable in the heart? What does one do if the heart is diseased, malformed, whether through nature or circumstance? What would it mean to construct a new heart for oneself, to try and animate it from one’s preferred materials? - sever and knit themselves together, a shaggy rope of associations. The Claire Denis film, *L’Intrus*, in which an aging man receives a heart transplant and finds himself struggling to come to grips with what it means to have a new heart *invade* your body. The story of Frankenstein and its relationship to the creative impulse - to imbue life within the non-living. A narrative film script I had been kicking around about a woman who lives by the sea, harvesting pearls with her husband, and finds one day her heart (in the person of her partner) has taken a boat out to sea with no explanation or plans to return. In all of these threads the heart is externalized, figured as capable of agency and autonomy distinct from its carrier. The Anne Carson line seemed to invert that - the speaker endeavors to exert autonomy over the contents and construction of their own heart - to master it, in other words, a common goal amongst those of us who feel yoked to the whims of that central organ.

But all of this felt like subtext for the clarity and simplicity of the image the line evoked for me: a person kneeling on the shore, the sea raging, the mud-grey of rocks and steel-grey of sky everywhere around them, their hands scrabbling desperately in the mud-sand, digging for something unknown, maybe just digging for the feeling of going deeper. An image of near-total surrender, of the farthest point one can reach before they must, in order to survive, shape for themselves a new heart.

I've always appreciated ekphrasis - broadly, writing that attempts to convey the experience of interacting with a particular work of art, or simply describe the contents of the work itself - and I thought it interesting to try a kind of inverse ekphrasis, in which the writing is the art being evoked, and another medium entirely (in this case, clothing) is the one attempting the evocation.

It started, quite obviously, with what this person scrabbling in the dirt is wearing. Something voluminous, almost shroud-like, layers to disguise and dissimulate. The tonal range inconsistent, subtle gradations of difference that speak to age, use, care, time. But all able to blend seamlessly into the setting - there's a kind of self-effacement or self-obliteration in dressing to dissolve into your surroundings. This person, this phantom on the shore - they wear black to dissolve into the night, muddy earthen shades to dissolve into the igneous smudge of landscape the ocean abuts.

I had already begun experimenting with natural dye processes, in order to expand my access to shades and tones that I couldn't find through traditional retail fabric suppliers. It also felt like such a clear expression of fabric's capacity to contain and remember - the tannins from the dye embedding themselves in the fabric, carrying a living memory of the plant from which they came. I also found that, through the process of dyeing, strange and unpredictable results could often occur, lending the process a 'living' feeling. At the same time as these explorations were taking off, I had also begun, following from the lava suit where a kind of 'rough' contact or treatment had been involved, seeing what would happen if I treated fabric roughly - if I left it out in the rain for days, if I buried it underground, if I boiled it and then machine dried it on high heat - all of these variables could inform texture, drape, as well as how and where the dye is taken up and to what degree.



Fabrics from Pearl collection, 2024.

One of the fabrics for this collection, used for the pleated trousers pictured above, is an 11oz 100% linen plain woven cloth, which I first boiled with soda ash to remove the waxes and sizings that mills will often treat fabric with. The high temperature water also causes the weave of this particular linen, which is woven with differently-sized warp and weft yarns, to ‘cinch up’ - essentially the heavier yarns pull on the lighter ones, causing an uneven, slubby, almost crepe-like texture. I then dyed the fabric, in one of three cauldrons I keep in and around my shower, with logwood, cutch, and iron. The logwood imparts a cool purple hue that darkens to a muddy gray and sometimes even approaches black when combined with iron, and the addition of cutch serves to ‘warm’ the shade a little bit. Oftentimes I will repeat this process until the shade gets where I want it to be - this particular batch of linen went through two dyebaths. By this point I’ve spent many hours with the fabric, before even cutting or sewing with it. This time feels important to my relationship to / understanding of the cloth - how it behaves and responds, and how whatever experience I put the fabric through leaves its

indelible mark. Each step of the process has an amplifying effect on the texture I mentioned earlier - this texture combined with the heavy weight of the fabric and the bouncy drape of the linen produces an altogether singular experience, almost weighted blanket-esque.



Dragonskin fabric, Long Coat, 2024.

The other dominant fabric in the collection is this 100% cotton ‘sashiko’ cloth (essentially a dobby weave meant to mimic the Japanese technique of sashiko mending). The raw fabric starts out as a natural cotton shade, a pure off-white with occasional dark speckles of plant matter, rather like an expensive vanilla ice cream with the bean fragments still present. I dyed the fabric with the same recipe as above: logwood, cutch, and iron. I was completely enamored with how this fabric held dye - the thick dobby yarns and uneven texture give the dye a pleasantly marbled effect - not over the top like a tie dye, but still with subtle gradations and variances that spoke to the specific conditions of the fabric’s experience. Combined with the raised dobby weave, the effect brought to mind fish scales or reptile skin, something close to armor. As I mentioned in the introduction, I’d always nursed an interest (not a scholarly one - the interest of an avid reader in my teens of trade paperback low fantasy novels) in historical

conceptions of 'enchantments' with regard to clothing and armor, so I seized upon that thread, calling the fabric dragonskin, and started exploring ways to impart something of the effect of a mythical dragon's hide into the cloth. I waxed the fabric with a mixture of paraffin and beeswax that I made myself (paraffin on its own didn't have enough of the marbled look I wanted, and beeswax, though it looked more noticeable on the fabric than paraffin, is less effective in sealing out the elements), first melting it, then applying with a brush, and then re-melting it into the fibers with a heat gun. This effectively waterproofs the fabric - it's how sailmakers in the 19th century would weather-seal their sails. So now I had waterproof scales to sew with. Of course that was what this phantom on the shore endeavoring to make a heart from the earth would be wearing. Armor for a living wound, hardened but still malleable.

The silhouettes featured in the collection are primarily oversized, constructed with room for both fabric and wearer to move, with the exception of the black 100% raw silk shirt-dress. I wanted the garment to look 'wet' in some way, so I cut the silk cloth on the bias, which gives it more 'cling and drape' - the sort of liquidy push and pull that occurs between the body and a closely worn garment. Raw silk lacks the luster traditionally associated with silk (particularly a silk satin); instead it has a nubby, almost pillied finish, due to the use of shorter, stubbier fibers. It has the effect of grounding silk a bit, lending it a sense of everyday-ness - making it seem less like an opulent, luxury fabric and more like something to be worn for labor or sport. The buttons are made from genuine pearl, and sewn by eye, i.e. without marking out an equal distance between each one. I like when buttons are just slightly askew, not obviously so but maybe just the slightest punctum (in the Barthes-ian sense¹) of asymmetry. To myself, I call them 'staccato' buttons - there's a kind of pace or momentum to how the eye moves down a row of buttons, and for me the effect of when buttons are clumped together, or spread too far apart, or placed at random, can feel almost rhythmic, and can therefore be played like an instrument.

¹ Roland Barthes' concept of a 'punctum', coined in his 1980 book *Camera Lucida*, refers to a seemingly small or unassuming detail of a photograph that establishes a direct and emotionally resonant connection between the viewer and the subject or object of the picture; it is the part of the photograph that 'wounds'.



Pearl buttons, Raw Silk Shirt-dress, 2024.

A pearl starts as a wound. Something foreign (a grain of sand, a parasite) enters the body and the body responds by attempting to subsume it, to make it coherent, depositing layer upon layer of nacre around the invader until it's encased in an iridescent sphere. Like molten earth, like waves against rock, something is gradually transformed over time, in an almost invisible set of processes that happen with a kind of inexorability, a churning and roiling that makes and re-makes the world, the way time and circumstance force us to make and re-make the structure of our hearts. The film that accompanies the collection of garments, called *Pearl*, is meant to serve as a kind of tonal accompaniment to these processes, as well as the mirrored processes of fabric dyeing, garment construction, etc. It attempts to evoke this subterranean/subaquatic alchemy, where molecules and minerals and protein helixes and parasitic and symbiotic organisms collide and break apart, combining and recombining to

make something as simple as a pearl, or as intricate as a heart. None of the processes seen in the film are digitally manipulated; they were mostly shot on 16mm film, with a few digital shots from a small and flexible endoscope camera. This is so that the images in the film feel as if they are actually taking place, in tangible physical space, rather than something created through a digital emulator. There is meant to be the faintest suggestion of narrative - the film features a person wearing one of the looks from the collection by the sea, alongside and amongst the processes mentioned above. I hope that the intermittent push-and-pull between these processes and the narrative suggested by the figure in the film alternately juxtapose and rhyme with each other, serving to underscore the relationship between the garments themselves and the world that evoked them.



Stills from 'Pearl' film, 2024.

There is also a handmade book featured in the exhibition, which like the film is meant to make some of these connections a bit more explicit, while hopefully also allowing a lot of space for mystery and unknowingness, those stealthy harbingers of meaning. It consists of a series of photographs I made by the ocean, attempting to evoke the world that birthed this phantom and these garments. It is meant as a kind of homage to the concept of the 'lookbook' within the fashion world, wherein designers will release a collection of photographs of the garments, often high-concept and expressive of the collection's vision. I like the idea of a lookbook in which the garments themselves are never seen, at least not in full - rather, the

collection is expressed through other means, such as textures that recall elements of the garments, shapes that rhyme with the cuts and details - basically, the lookbook is about the emotional landscape of the collection rather than directly addressing the garments themselves. Each of the images in the book is hand-printed silver gelatin, made in the darkroom. There are swatches of fabrics from the collection, as well as paper I made by hand from cotton fabric scraps, the leavings of previously made garments. Again, process is paramount here, as the physical construction of the book, the way the images were made, etc. are meant to underscore the role of the maker's hand, as well as the work's physical existence in time - or rather, its existence *through* time.

-

I wasn't being totally forthright at the start of this section - about summer 2023, when this work started. I vaguely described myself as being back in the blast zone, bearish on the viability of romantic love, etc. What actually happened is that the person who I made that first shirt for, back in 2020, came back into my life, quite suddenly. We had only seen each other once since our relationship ended, a few weeks after, to return books we'd borrowed. And then, just like that, she was back in my life, like she'd never been gone, saying all the things that in the intervening three years I had so desperately wanted her to say. It felt cartoonishly perfect, like one of those 'what if' scenarios where a person who deeply hurt you returns to your life to admit fault, to tell you how wrong they were, to tell you how all the things you had seen so clearly at the time were actually right, that you were right about it all. She came to see me here in Athens, said she never wanted to leave. This posture - my revealing it after the fact, in closing - is less a literary device than it is the result of my having originally balked at sharing it because it seems *too much* like a literary device. It was in the heart of summer, a delirious time. It lasted about three weeks. There was a vague explanation this time, that she had gotten ahead of herself, that she was all messed up and needed to get her head right, and again she

vaporized herself from my life. I doubt very much that I will ever see her again. In those three weeks I made her two pairs of pants and a shirt.

Works Cited

Barthes, Roland. *Camera lucida*. Vintage, 1993.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Essay. In *Illuminations*. Harcourt, 1968.

Carson, Anne. *The beauty of the husband*. Vintage, 2001.