RESEARCH AND DESIGN

‘ Fashion Design, according to Vivienne Westwood is “almost like mathematics”. You have a vocabulary of ideas which you have to add and subtract in order to come up with an equation right for the times. ’

Vivienne Westwood: An Unfashionable Life, Jane Mulvagh

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Are you fashionable?

There is no point trying to be fashionable. This book cannot tell you how to design fashion; it can only tell you what the ingredients are, ways to put them together, and many of the important things you must consider when designing clothes. Clothing is only 'fashionable' when your peers or the industry deem a design to be of the zeitgeist. It either is or it isn't.

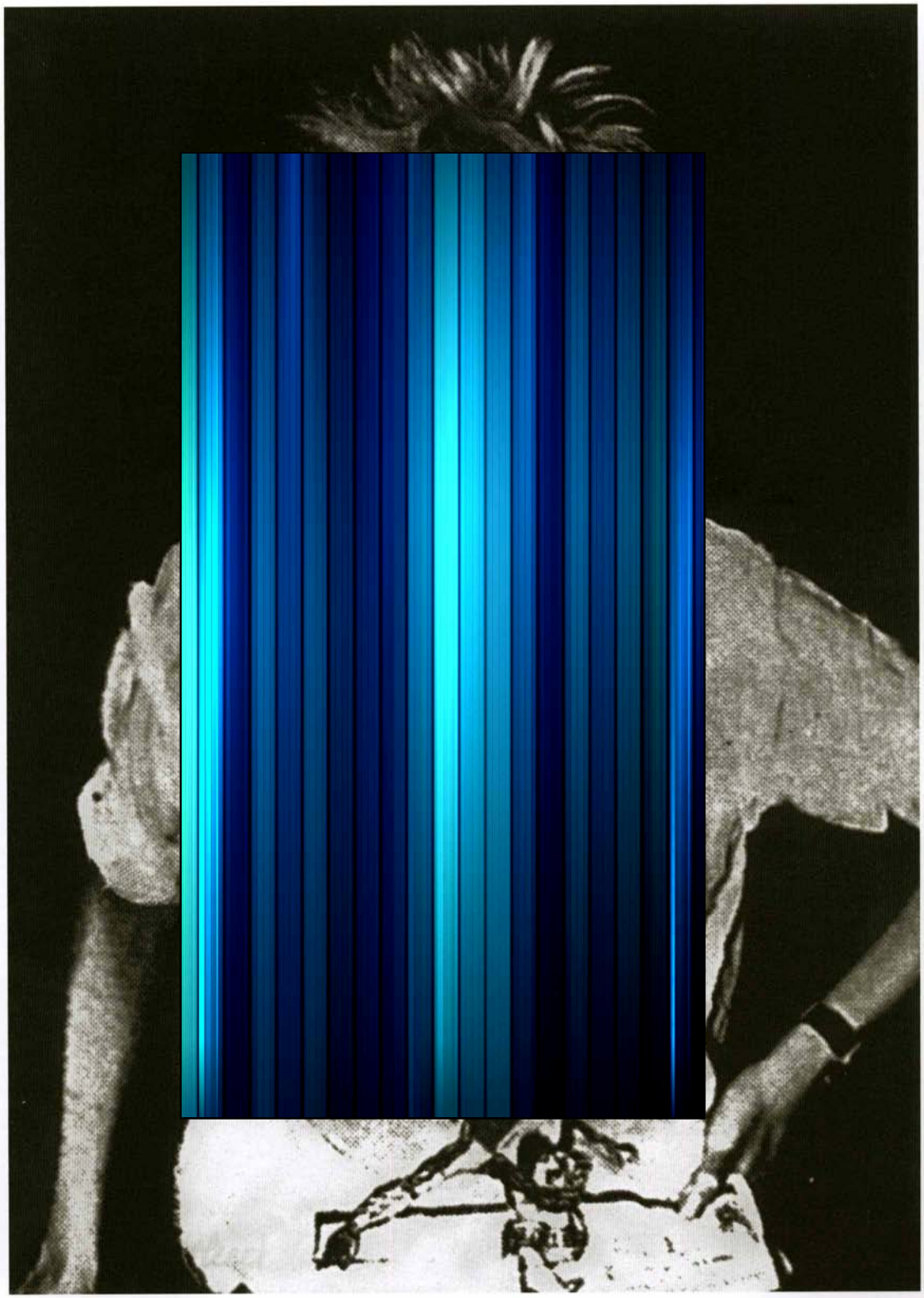
The Oxford English Dictionary defines fashion as 'current popular custom or style, especially in dress'. Essentially it means a style that is up to date, and how this is agreed upon is subjective and reliant on a number of factors. For instance, the punk movement was a reflection of how many young people were feeling in the late 1970s – disenchanted with the politics and culture of the time – and was somewhat engineered by Malcolm McLaren and designer Vivienne Westwood. Not that the punk movement set out to be 'fashionable' – anything but! Its aim was to be peripheral, subversive. But this reinforces the idea that trying too hard should not be a factor.

Exhibitions, films and music can have a huge influence on what is deemed fashionable at a given time. In 2001, Baz Luhrmann's movie, *Moulin Rouge*, had a direct influence on the catwalk and many designers looked to burlesque for inspiration that season. Dior Homme's designer Hedi Slimane has cited controversial Babyshambles singer Pete Doherty as an influence, even publishing a book of photographs of the singer.

For fashion design, it is important to develop an awareness of your own taste and style (not how you dress – designers are often the worst dressed in a room because they are too busy thinking about how to dress others). Not everyone has an aptitude or desire to design 'unconventional' clothes. Some designers focus on the understatement or detail of garments. Other designers design 'conventional' garments, but it is the way they are put together (or styled) that makes the outfit original and modern. Knowing what you are best at is essential, but doesn't mean that you should not experiment. It can take a while to 'know yourself' and this period of discovery is usually spent at college. There has to be a certain amount of soul searching; it's not so much being the designer that you want to be, but rather finding out the designer that you are. You must be true to your own vision of how you want to dress someone.

Beyond that, the rest is in the hands of the industry and the fashion-buying public to decide, and for every person who likes your work there will be someone who really doesn't. This is common and working in such a subjective field can be confusing, but eventually you will learn to navigate your way through criticism and either develop a steely exterior or recognise which opinions you respect and which to disregard. Once you accept this, you are free to get on with what you are best at – designing clothes.

1 Vivienne Westwood wearing her 'Destroy' T-shirt.



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Know your subject

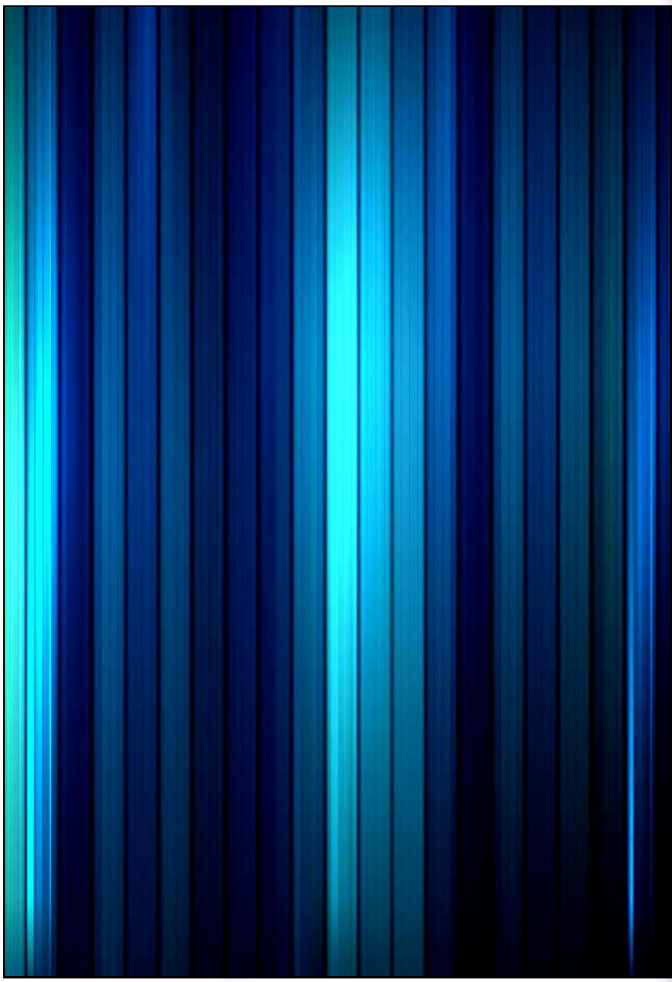
If a career in fashion is what you want then you need to know your subject. This might appear to be an obvious statement, but it must be said. You may protest, 'but I don't want to be influenced by other designers' work'. Of course not, but unless you know what has preceded you, how do you know that you aren't naively reproducing someone else's work?

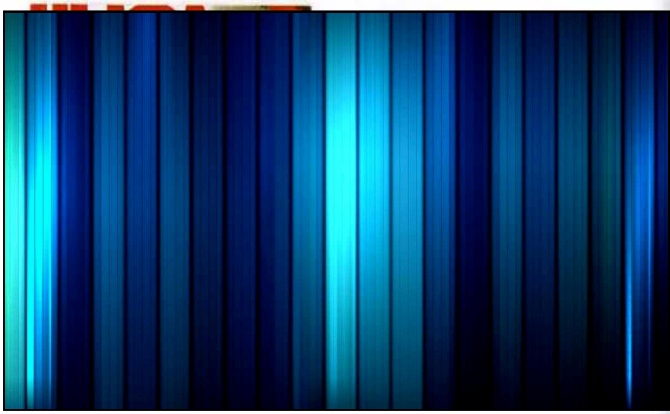
Making yourself 'fashion aware' doesn't happen overnight, and, if you're passionate about the subject it is natural to want to find out about it (that's why you've picked up this book). If you are applying to a university or college to study fashion, your interview panel will want you to demonstrate that you have a rudimentary knowledge of designers and their styles. You may even be asked who you like and dislike in order to qualify your answer.

Magazines are a good place to start, but don't just automatically reach for *Elle* and *Vogue*. There are many more magazines out there, each appealing to a different niche market and style subculture and you should have a knowledge of as many as possible; they are all part of the fashion machine.

Magazines will not only make you aware of different designers, but so-called lifestyle magazines will also make you aware of other design industries and cultural events that often influence (or will be influenced by) fashion. By regularly reading magazines you will also become aware of stylists, journalists, fashion photographers and hair and make-up artists, models, muses, brands and shops that are all-important to the success of a fashion designer.

There are also some great websites that show images of outfits on the catwalk almost as soon as the show has taken place. One such site, www.style.com, is free.





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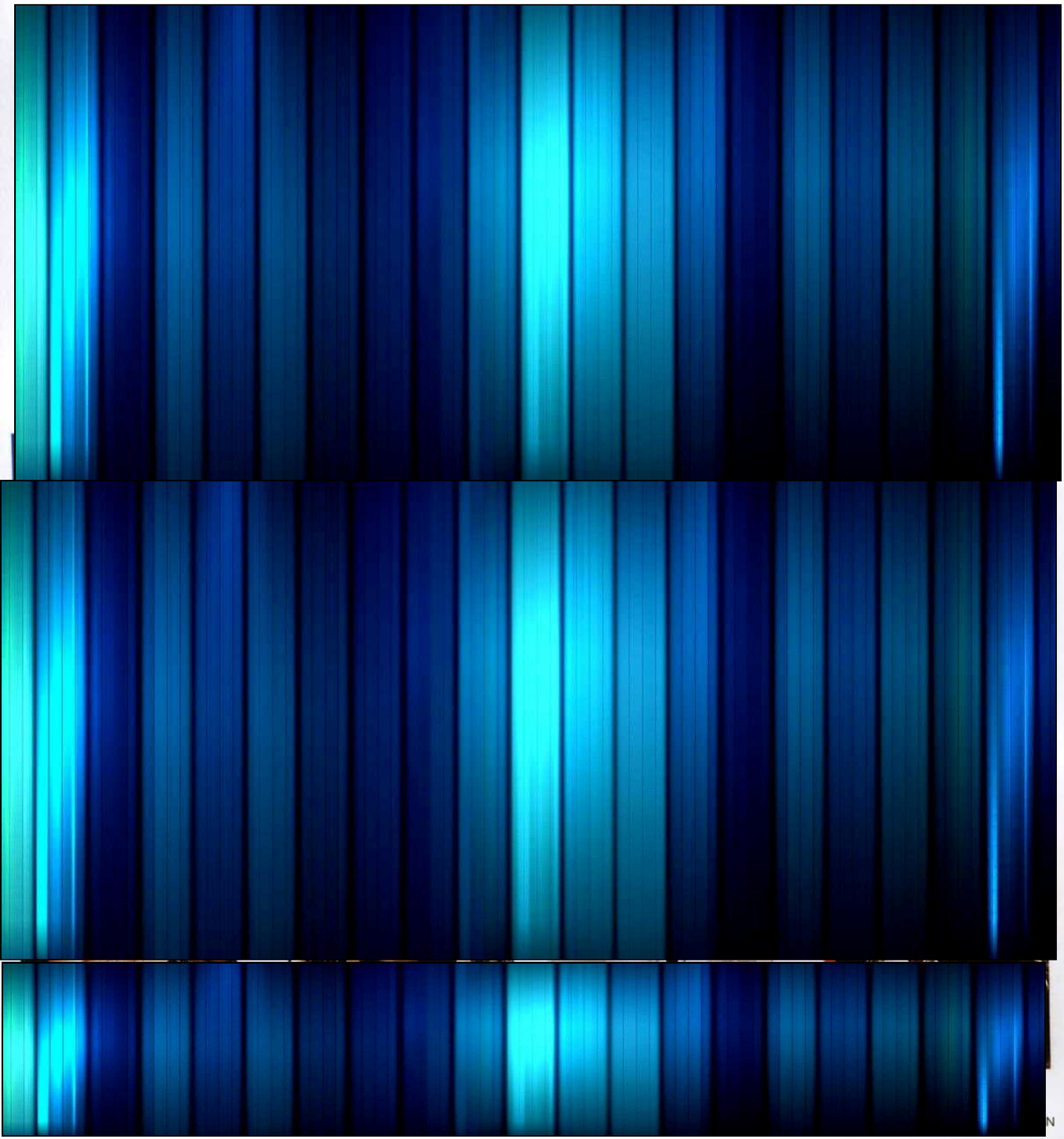
1 There are numerous fashion and lifestyle magazines that will inform and inspire your own work.



Starting your research

Designers are like magpies, always on the look out for something to use or steal! Fashion moves incredibly fast compared to other creative industries and it can feel like there is constant pressure to reinvent the wheel each season. Designers need to be continually seeking new inspiration in order to keep their work fresh, contemporary, and above all, to keep themselves stimulated.

In this sense, research means creative investigation, and good design can't happen without some form of research. It feeds the imagination and inspires the creative mind.

Research takes two forms. The first kind is sourcing material and practical elements. Many fledgling designers forget that finding fabrics and other ingredients – rivets, fastenings or fabric treatments, for example – must make up part of the process of research and having an appreciation of what is available, where from, and for how much, is essential.

The second form of research is the kind you make once you've found a theme or concept for use in your designs. Themes can be personal, abstract or more literal. Alexander McQueen, Vivienne Westwood and John Galliano have designed collections where the sources of inspiration are clear for anyone to see. McQueen's 'It's A Jungle Out There' 1997–1998 collection mixed religious painting with the evocation of an endangered African antelope. Westwood has drawn on pirates, the paintings of Fragonard and 17th- and 18th-century decorative arts in the Wallace Collection for inspiration in different collections. Galliano has been influenced by the circus, ancient Egypt, punk singer Siouxsie Sioux and the French Revolution.

Designers may also convey a mood or use a muse for inspiration. Galliano currently cites singer Gwen Stefani as a muse, but has also based collections around 1920s' dancer Josephine Baker and Napoleon's Empress Josephine.

Using a theme or concept makes sense because it will hold together the body of work, giving it continuity and coherence. It also sets certain boundaries – which of course the designer is free to break – but having a theme initially gives the designer focus.

The Pros: Boudicca on research

With a collection, how do you decide on a theme?

Throughout there is discussion, arguments, discovery and curiosity.

What is your approach to research?

It is an ongoing dialogue that you have with yourself and those around you, a constant search for knowledge. Within that search you come across questions that need more development and that you may have no answer for. It is then that you go on this quest for visual and intellectual answers that somehow create a new question, a language that may answer or leave you with confusion.

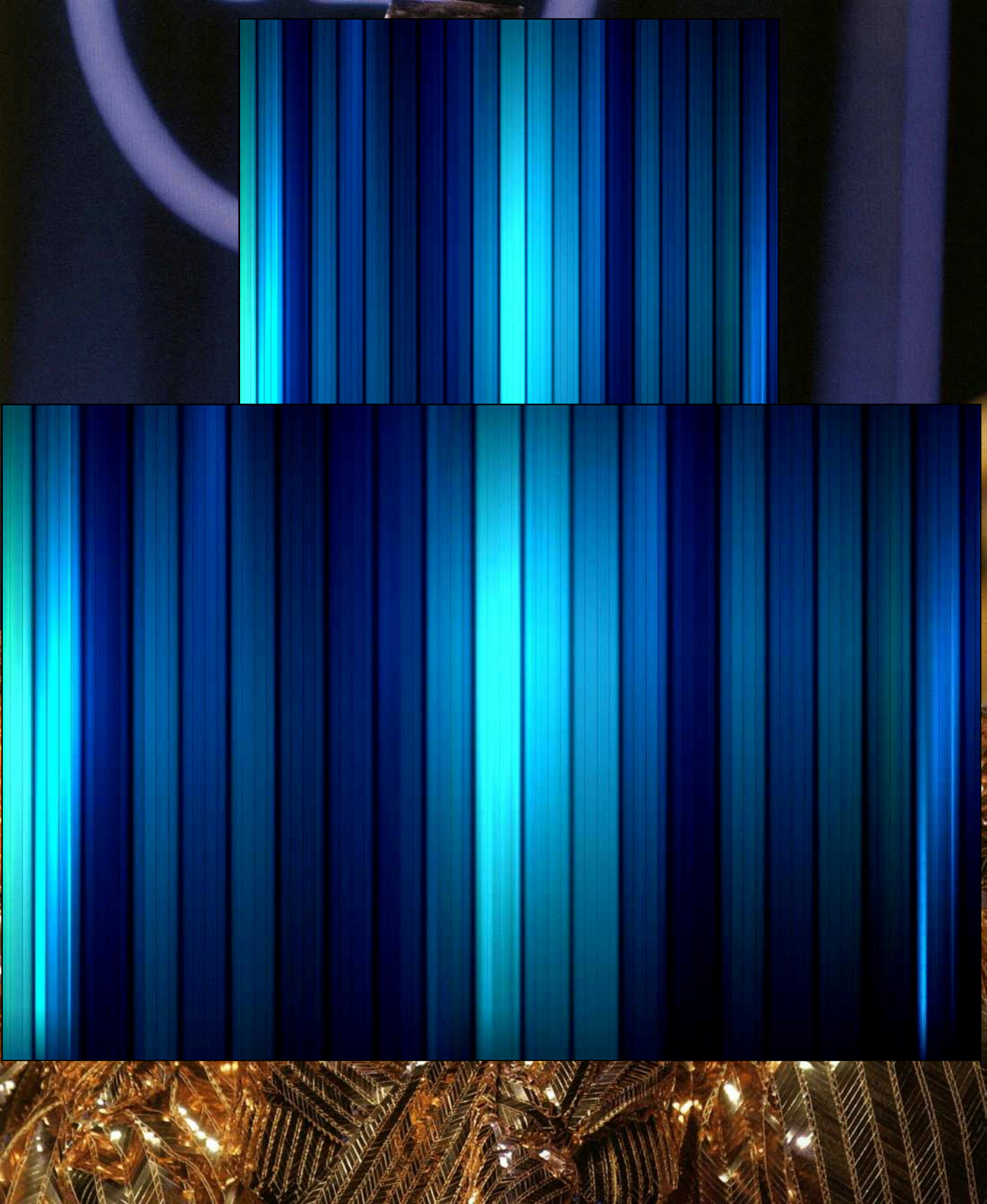
What do you want to express through clothes?

A journey, a feeling of tomorrow.

What is your approach to the design process?

This is the further ascension into three-dimensional dialogue between idea and executioner. The base of a two-dimensional idea is honest, but also only begins the process. Then the design journey begins by weaving a web of ideas, silhouettes, fabric, colours, textures, and sound even can develop your thoughts towards design. There is a final vision and the design process works outwards through all the media mentioned.

1 Christian Dior haute couture Spring/Summer collection 2004.



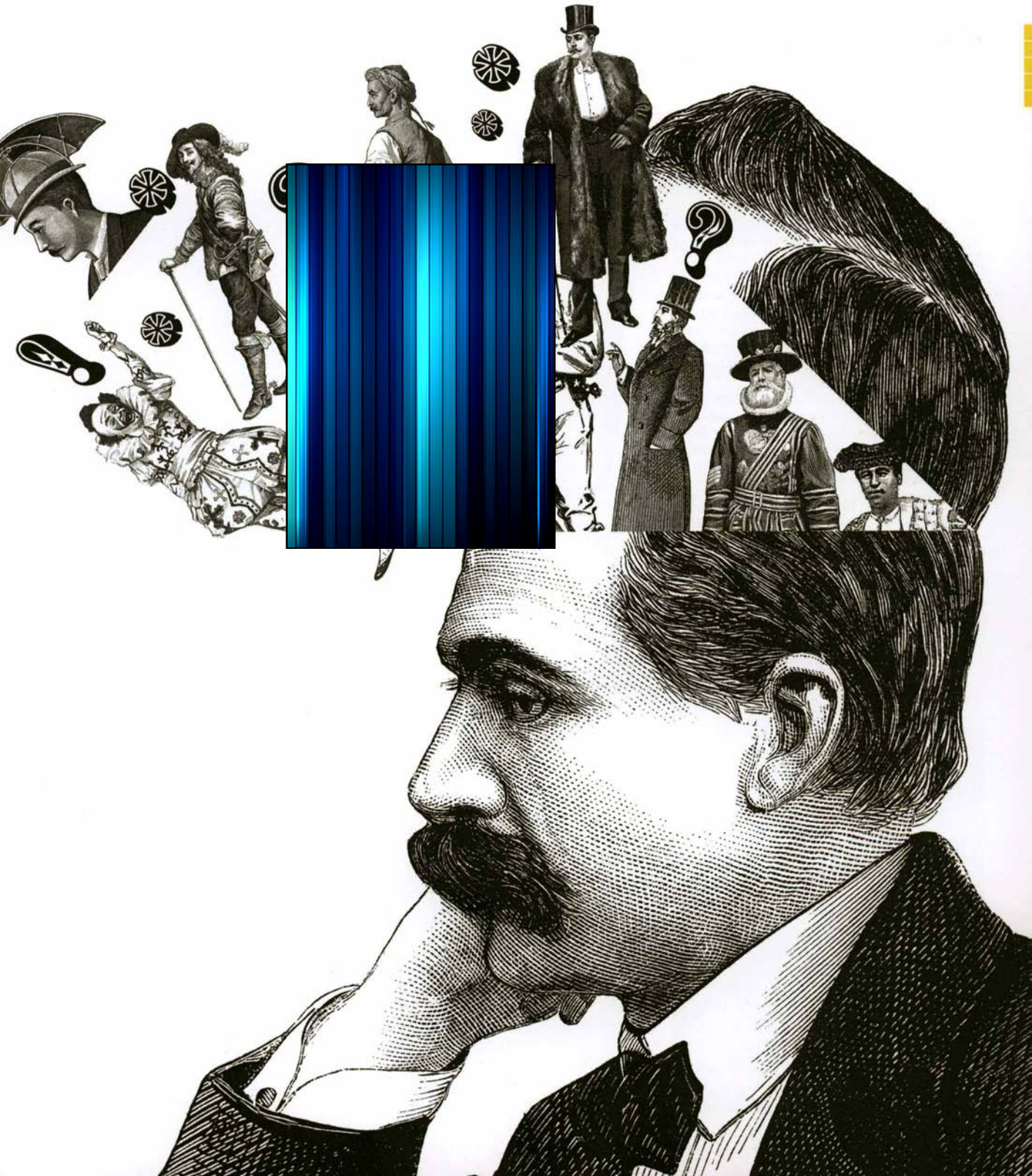
Choosing a concept

When choosing a theme, be honest. It needs to be something that you can work and live with for the duration of the collection. This means that it should be a subject that you are interested in, that stimulates you and that you understand. Some designers prefer to work with an abstract concept that they want to express through the clothing (for example, 'isolation'), while others want to use something more visually orientated (such as 'the circus').

Either of these approaches is appropriate and it is about choosing which works for you. But it does need to work for you; it is pointless choosing a theme that doesn't inspire you. If the ideas are still struggling to come after a certain point a clever designer will be honest and question their choice of theme.

Remember, press and buyers are generally only interested in the outcome. Do the clothes look good? Do they flatter? Do they excite? Will they sell? They are not necessarily interested how well you've managed to express quantum physics through a jacket. But if this is what you want to express, then do it.

1 Choose your theme or concept carefully as it should be a help to designing, not a hindrance.



Sources of research

Where to go to begin your research depends on your theme or concept. For an enquiring designer the act of researching is like detective work, hunting down elusive information and subject material that will ignite a spark.

The easiest place to start to research is on the Internet. The Web is a fantastic source of images and information. It is also great for sourcing fabrics direct from manufacturers that produce specialist material or companies that perform specific services.

A good library is a treasure. Local libraries are geared to provide books to a broad cross-section of the community so tend to have a few books about many subjects. Specialist libraries are the most rewarding, and the older the library the better – books that are long out of print will (hopefully) still be on the shelves, or at least viewable upon request. Colleges and universities should have a library geared towards the courses that are being taught, though access may be restricted if you are not actually studying there.

Flea markets and antique fairs are useful sources of inspirational objects and materials for designers. It goes without saying that clothing of any kind, be it antique or contemporary, can inspire more clothes. Historic, ethnic or specialist clothing – military garments, for example – offer insight into details, methods of manufacture and construction that you may not have encountered before.

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1 A Marc Jacobs's jacket inspired by military clothing (2/3).

4 Vivienne Westwood pirate shirt and sash.

5 Illustration of pirates. Vivienne Westwood researched the cut of pirate clothing for her pirate collection Autumn/Winter 1981/82.

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Like flea markets, charity shops are great places to find clothes, books, records and bric-a-brac that, in the right hands and with a little imagination, could prove inspirational. Everyday objects that are no longer popular or are perceived as kitsch can be appropriated, rediscovered and used ironically to design clothes.

Museums, such as London's Victoria and Albert Museum, not only collect and showcase interesting objects from around the world, both historical and contemporary, but also have an excellent collection of costume that can be viewed upon request.

Large companies, with the budget, send their designers on research trips, often abroad, to search for inspiration. There, the designers are armed with a research budget and a camera, and can record and buy anything that might prove useful for the coming season. Designers with a tight budget might use a holiday abroad as a similar opportunity.

Sources of images can be photocopies, postcards, photographs, tearsheets from magazines and drawings. But anything can be used for research: images, fabrics, details such as buttons or an antique collar – anything that inspires you qualifies as research. Whichever items you collect must be within easy reach (and view) so that you have your reference constantly about you.

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The research book

As a designer you will eventually develop an individual approach to 'processing' this research. Some designers collect piles of photocopies and fabrics that may find their way on to a wall in the studio. Others compile research or sketchbooks where images, fabrics and trimmings are collected and collated, recording the origin and evolution of a collection. Still others take the essence of the research and produce what are called mood-, theme- or storyboards.

A research book is not necessarily solely for the designer's use. Showing research to other people is useful when trying to convey the themes of a collection. It might be used to communicate your concept to your tutor, your employers, employees or a stylist.

Research books are not just scrapbooks. A scrapbook infers that the information is collected, but unprocessed. There is nothing duller than looking through pages of lifeless, rectangular images that have been (too) carefully cut out. It is also debatable how much the designer has gleaned from creating pages like this. A research book should reflect the thought processes and personal approach to the project. It becomes more personal when it is drawn on and written in, and when the images and materials that have been collected are manipulated or collaged.

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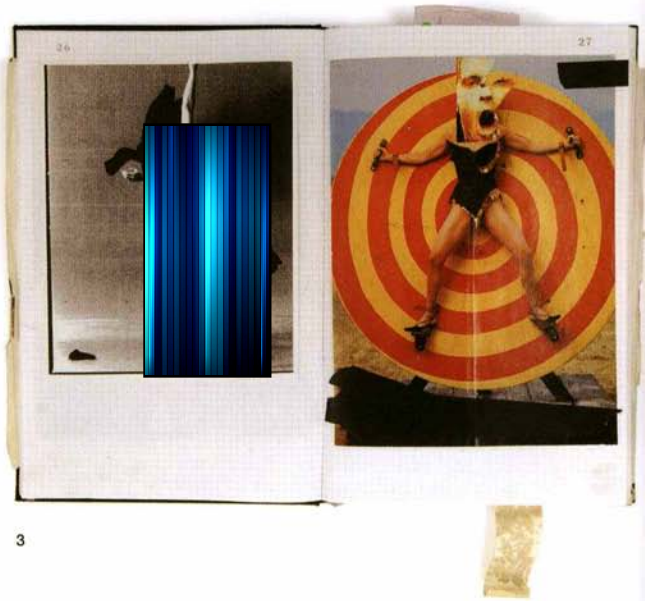

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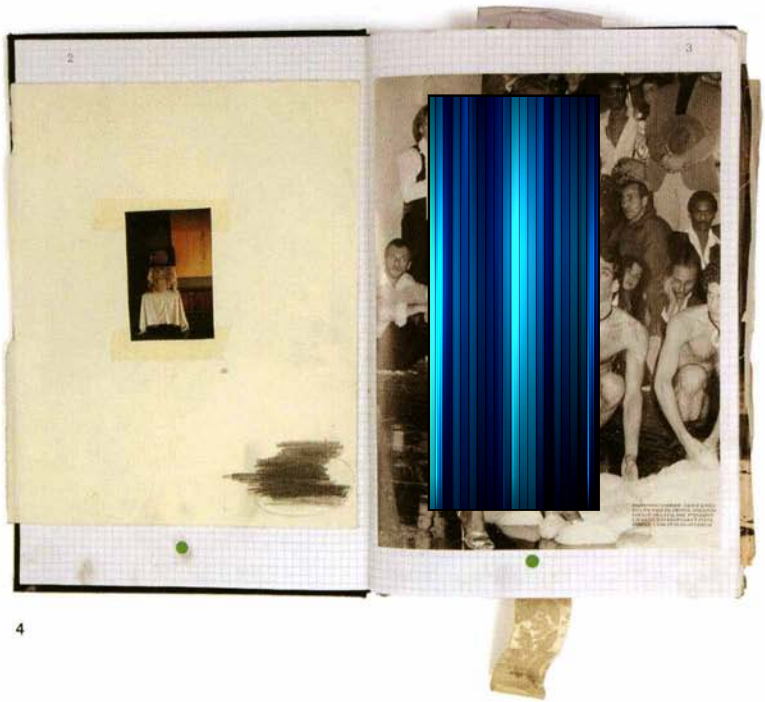
1/2 Boudicca's research
3/4 books are developed around an ongoing dialogue between the designers and with others in a constant search for knowledge. Their research is very much about pursuing a trail of questions and answers that is both visual and intellectual.

5/6 Other examples of research books.



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Collage

The word 'collage' is derived from the French word for glue. A good collage is where the separate elements (images) work on different levels at the same time, to form both a whole and also its individual component parts. Successful collages usually include a bricolage of different-sized, differently sourced images that provide a stimulating visual rhythm.

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Drawing

Drawing a part or the whole of a picture you have collected as research helps you to understand the shapes and forms that make up the image, which, in turn, enables you to appreciate and utilise the same curve in a design or when cutting a pattern.

Using collage and making your own drawings allows you to deconstruct an image such as a photograph, photocopy, drawing or postcard. This is necessary because it may not be the whole image that will ultimately be useful to your designs; a picture may have been chosen for its 'whole', but it is only when it has been examined in more depth that other useful elements may be discovered. For example, a photograph of a Gothic cathedral is rich in decorative flourishes, but it almost needs a magnifying glass to be able to understand the detail. By cutting up an image or using a 'viewfinder' – a rectangle paper 'frame' that enables you to focus on part of an image, much like the viewfinder on a camera – smaller elements or details can become more apparent and be more easily examined.

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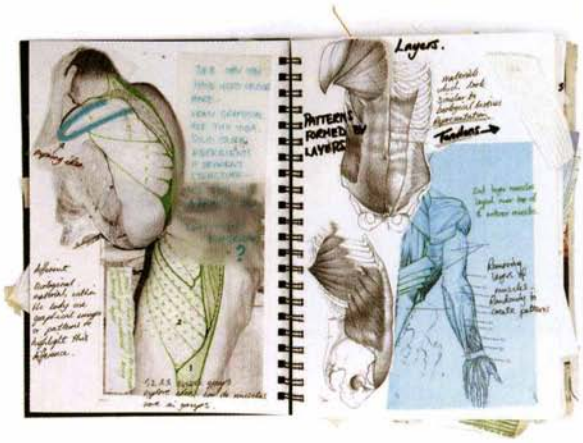

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1/2/3 Examples of analytical drawing taking place in a research book.

4/5 Examples of juxtaposition.

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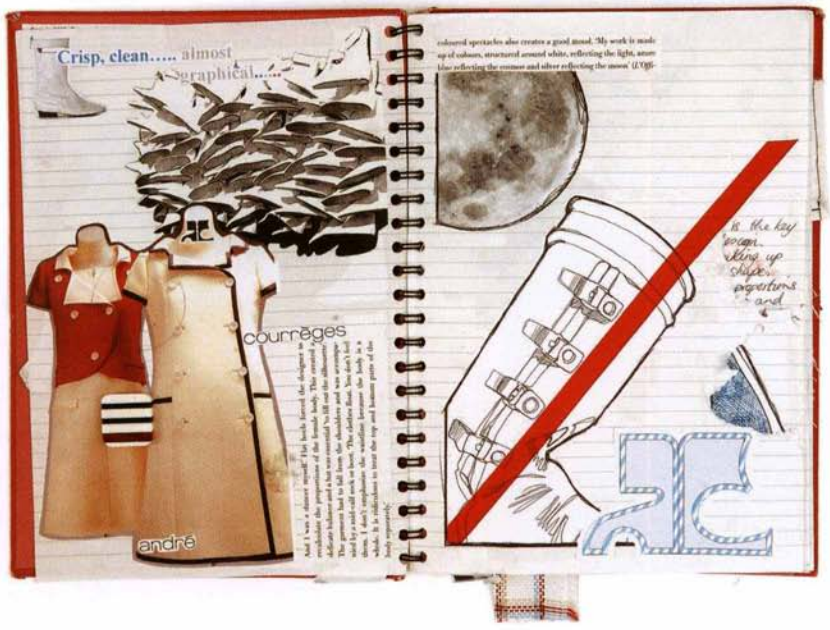

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Juxtaposition

Placing images and fabrics together on the pages of your research book will help you to make important decisions about the content of your designs. Sometimes disparate images or materials may share similarities even though they are essentially different. For example, the spiral shape of an ammonite fossil is similar to a spiral staircase or a rosette. Or an image may be suggestive of a fabric you have sourced – for example, a piece of devoré velvet may evoke the texture of moss and lead you to think about natural imagery.

By utilising drawing, collage and juxtaposition in your research books, you are processing and analysing what has been collected. You are able to render and interpret images and materials as part of your own logical progression or journey.

Mood-, theme- and storyboards

Mood-, theme- and storyboards are essentially a distillation of research. In a sense they are the 'presentation' version of the research book. They are made up as collages, and, as the name suggests, generally mounted on board, which makes them more durable. They are used by a designer to communicate the themes, concepts, colours and fabrics that will be used to design the season's collection. They may include key words that convey a 'feeling', such as 'comfort' or 'seduction'. If the collection must be tailored to a particular client, the images may be more specifically attuned to the perceived lifestyle/identity of the potential client.

1 The fabrication and colour on this mood-board are inspired by the images behind; the acquatic image evokes transparent and fluid fabrics. The feathered corsage suggests fractured colours and a dot design.

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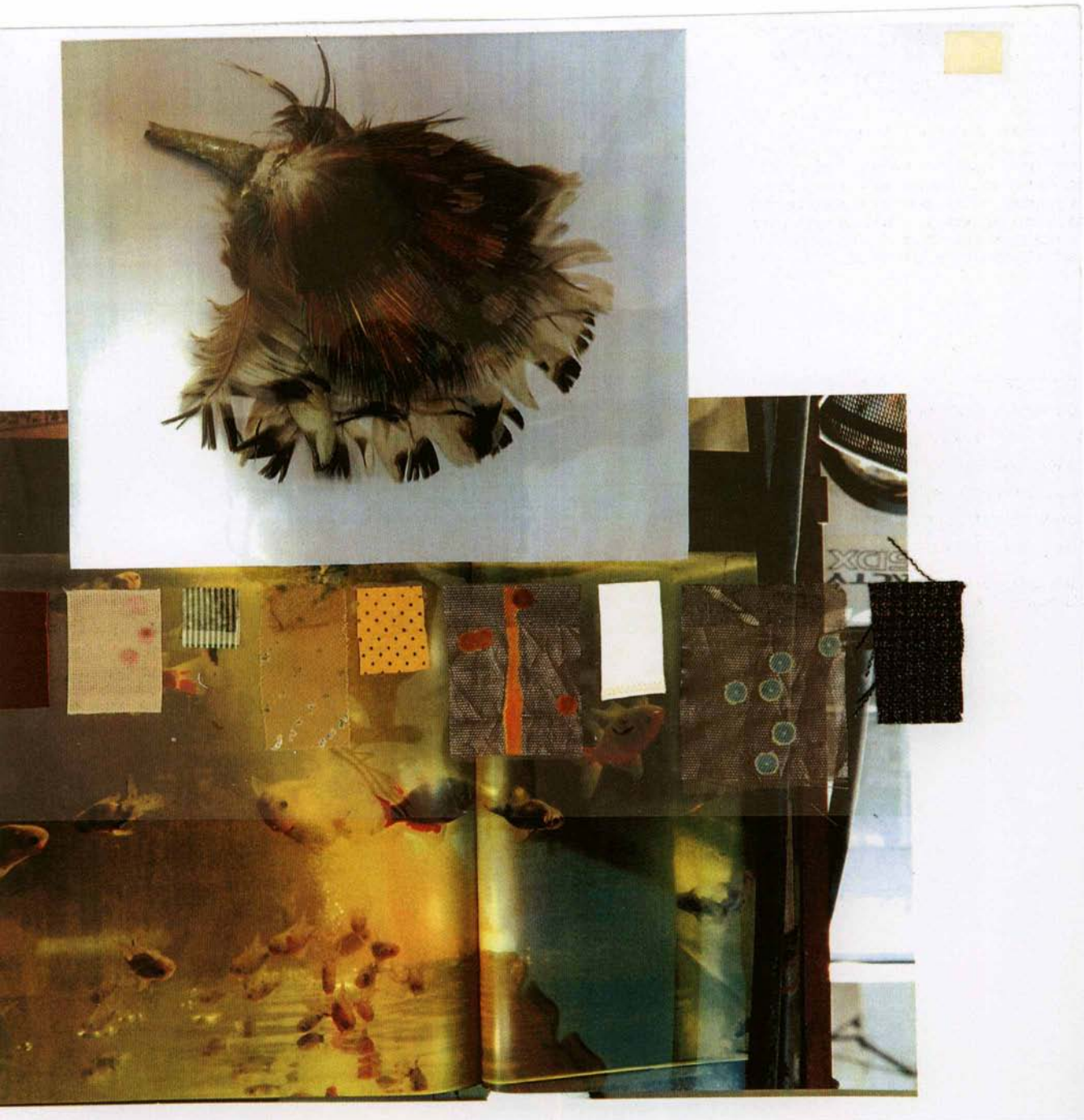
'I never saw any point in stopping at the way in which a conventional wisdom decreed a jacket should be cut. Early on, I realised how important it is just to be curious. You mustn't be frightened or hide behind pre-conceived ideas. You have to experiment. You just do it and it's beautiful because you discover an energy there which feeds you. There are no rules.'

John Galliano, from *Galliano* by Colin McDowell, Weidenfeld & Nicolson



Designing

Once your research has been collated, you can start on design. But there is nothing more intimidating than a blank page. The process can be very frustrating; even when the designs start to come it can take a while before any of them are very satisfactory. This is a natural part of the design process. Many early designs are thrown away – and you might even begin to question your abilities. Don't panic! It takes time to hit your stride, and after sweating a while over the page better ideas will start to emerge. Explore every possibility that comes to mind and discard nothing at this stage. You might discover the potential of an idea later on when you look back over your designs.

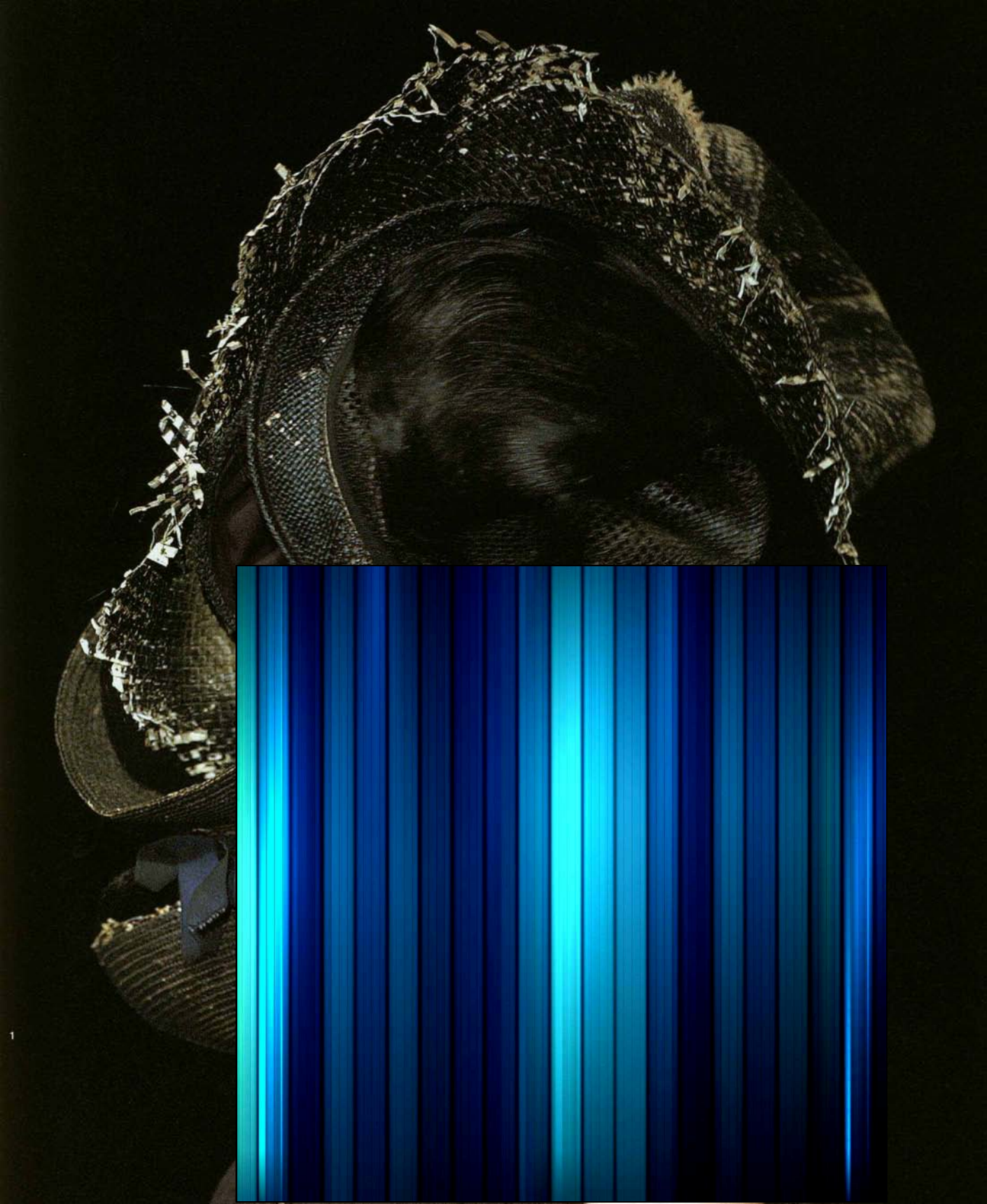
A designer's identity or style comes with time, but as well as that, the clothes themselves need an identity or to form part of a vision in order to stand apart from the competition. While Chanel's identity is far-reaching and rarely strays over many seasons, the identity of a collection of clothes can be based on the use of silhouette, detail and fabric for a single season – for example, Junya Watanabe's spring/summer 2005 collection.

Certain elements should run through the designs to give them coherence. It could be where an armhole is cut, the placement of a seam on the body in a particular way, or a method of finishing the fabric. If these elements tie in strongly with your theme to work as a 'whole' you are on your way to making a real statement with your designs.

'Fashion is very important. It is life-enhancing and, like everything that gives pleasure, it is worth doing well.'

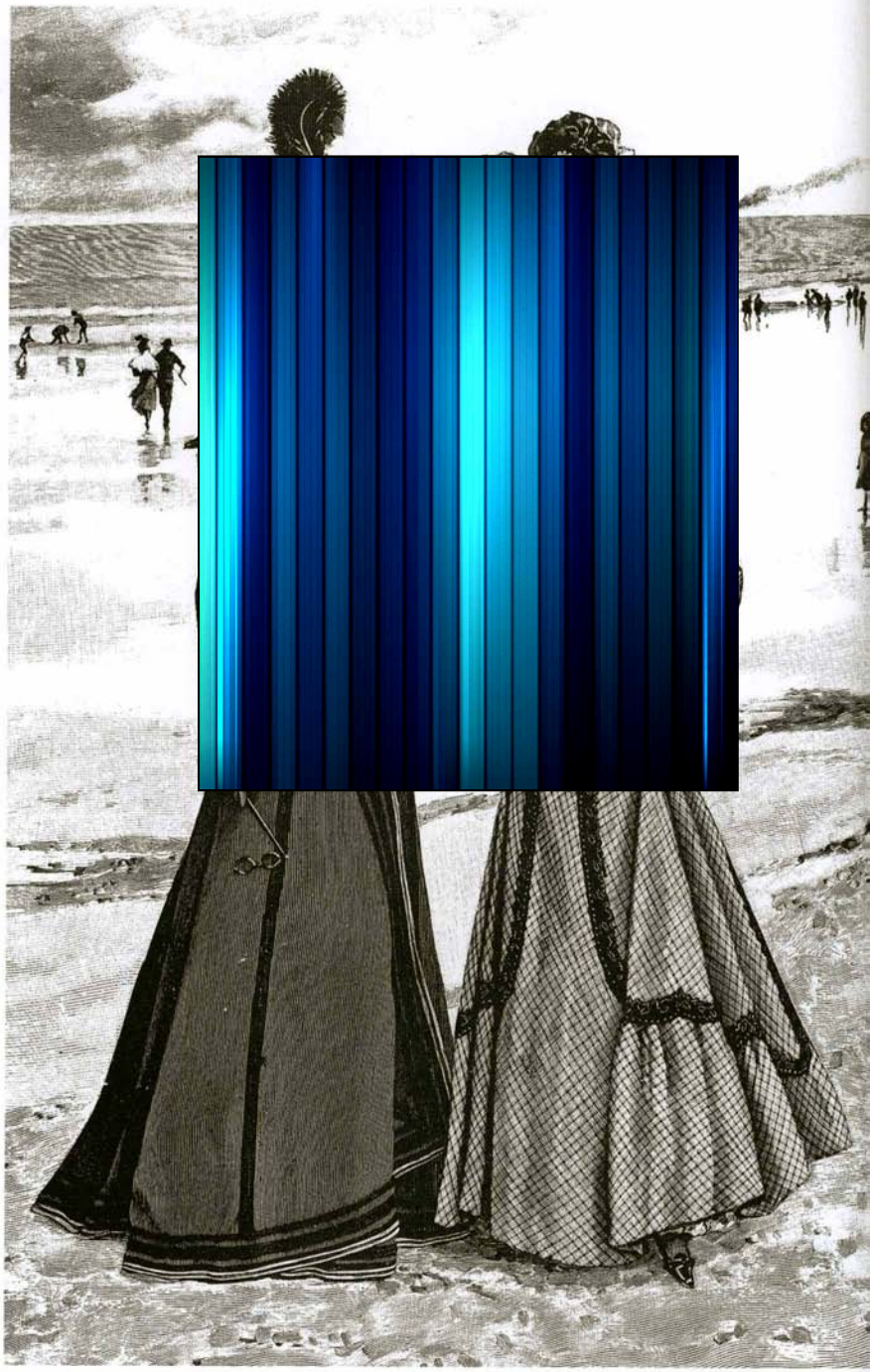
Vivienne Westwood: You ask the Questions, The *Independent*, 21 February 2001

1 For Spring/Summer 2005, Junya Watanabe used zips woven together as a decorative detail throughout the collection.



Ideal bodies

Historically, fashionable clothing was designed to enhance and idealise the natural silhouette of the human form by exaggerating parts of the body. The 'ideal' body shape continues to be based on an 'hourglass'. However, today, most clothes follow the line of the body itself and the fashionable silhouette is less enhanced than it was before. Perhaps this is because it is easier than ever to forego aids such as the corset or bustle and to alter the body itself by living a healthy lifestyle or making use of cosmetic surgery. But the evolution of the silhouette also relates to changing social and cultural trends.



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1 These examples show off typical Victorian hourglass figures.

2 Examples of corsets and hooped skirts with bustles that when worn exaggerate the buttocks.

Nip and tuck

The corset, as we know it, has been worn by women – and men – since the early part of the 16th century. Since that time various contraptions have been added to corsets to exaggerate the hips and buttocks in different ways. Petticoats, farthingales, panniers, crinolines and bustles are all contraptions that have been fashionable at different times in the last five hundred years to accentuate the shapeliness of the human body and to project a shifting ideal of the female and male form.

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Dior's 'New Look' collection of 1947 was a response to the stringent use of fabrics during the war years and a conscious feminisation of the female form. It was defined by the generous use of luxurious fabrics and an accentuated wasp-waisted silhouette with widely flared skirts over padded hips, and its influence endured all through the 1950s.

Corsets have also affected the shape of the chest, from the cleavage of the 18th and 19th centuries through to the mono bosom of the early 20th century. The supported chest reached a climax with the torpedo-like girdles and bras of the late 1940s and 1950s, revived and refigured in Jean-Paul Gaultier's signature bra tops of the early 1990s.

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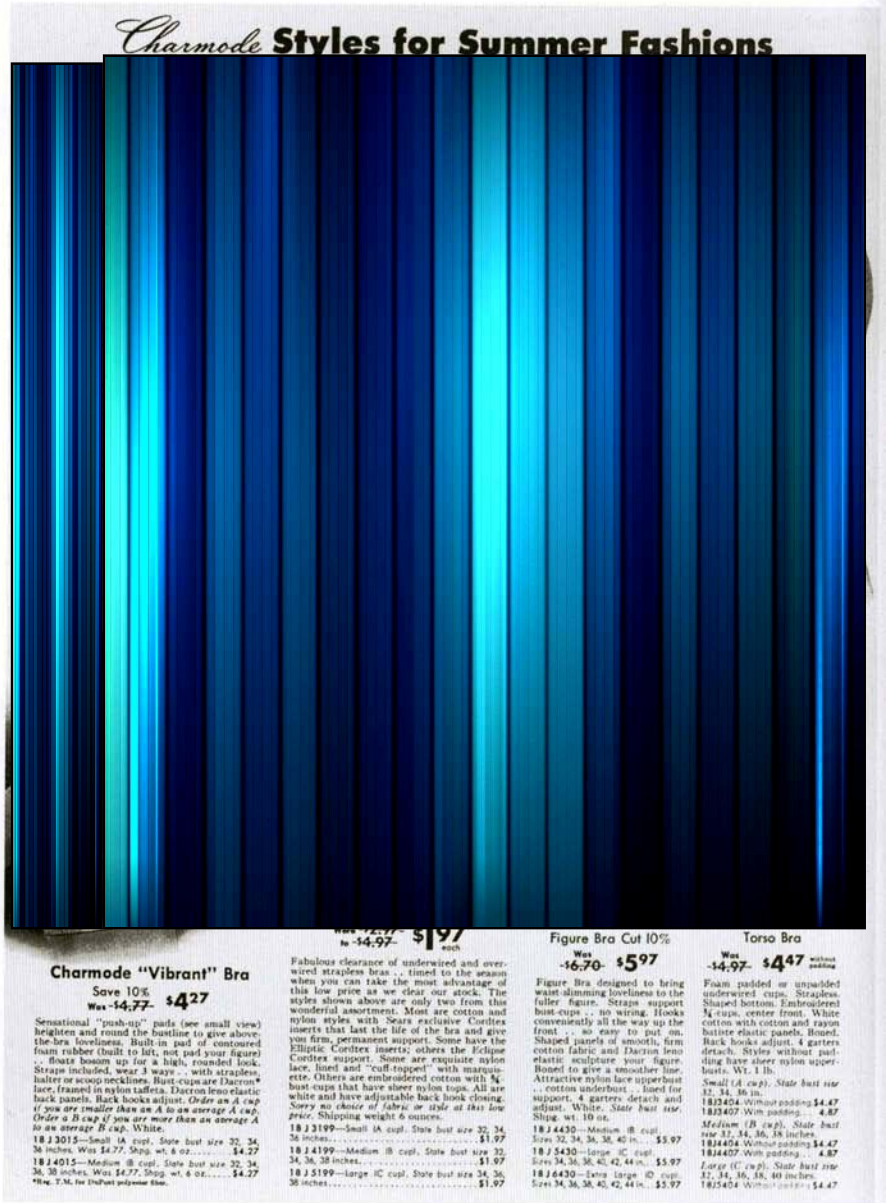

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1/2 Typical clothing of the 1950s, as pictured in Sears catalogues.

3 Illustrations by the French fashion illustrator Erté portraying the typical 1920s' silhouette.

In the 1920s and later in the 1960s, fashionable women adopted a radical silhouette that subverted the hourglass form. The 1920s' silhouette was less constrained than what had preceded it – although, perversely, curvier women were required to artificially flatten their bodies with tube-like bandeaux in order to fit with the times. The 1960s' silhouette went hand-in-hand with the trend for a more boyish look. Fashionable women wore their hair short, and, if they were lucky, they already had flat chests, narrow shoulders and hips which complemented miniskirts and dresses.

Another example of an enhanced silhouette that was hugely popular in the 1980s and 1990s was the use of exaggerated shoulder pads in what became coined at the time as 'power dressing'. The exaggerated shape became synonymous with strength, authority and the excesses of capitalism. The large pads allowed unstructured garments to hang from them, but as garments became more fitted the triangulation became more extreme. Giorgio Armani was a designer heavily associated with this look.

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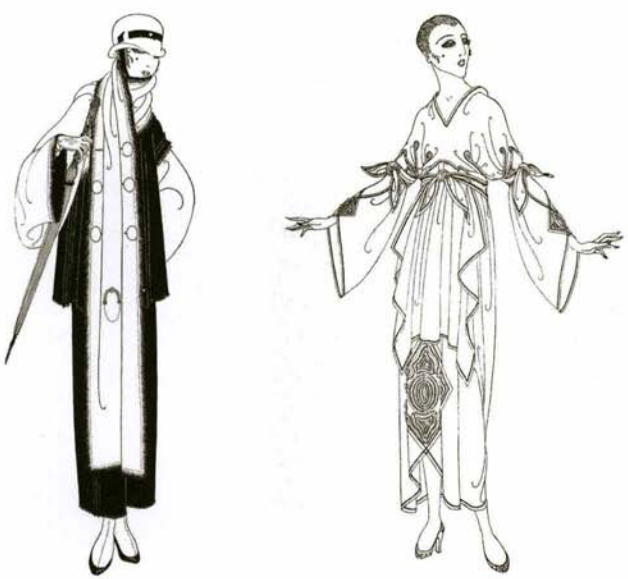
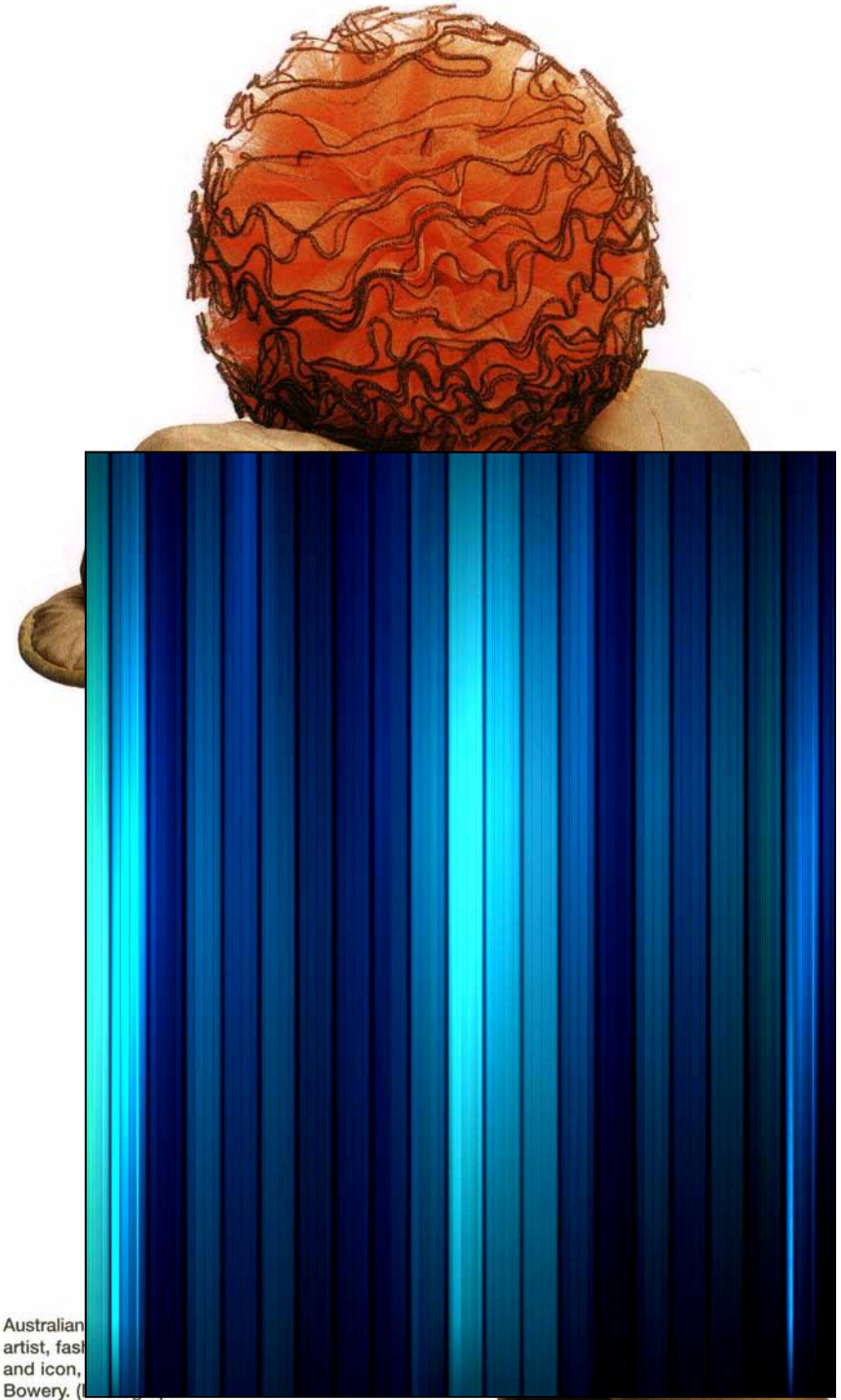


Silhouette

Our first impression of an outfit when it emerges on the catwalk is formed by its silhouette, which means that we look at its overall shape before we interrogate the detail, fabric or texture of the garment.

Silhouette is a fundamental consideration in your decision making. Which parts of the body do you want to emphasise and why? A full skirt will draw attention to the waist, forming an arrow shape between waist and hem. Wide shoulders produce the same result and can also make the hips look narrower. The waist itself does not have to be fixed as it is anatomically placed. It can be displaced through curved side seams or the raising or lowering of a horizontal (waist) line. The silhouette can also be affected by using fabric to create volume around the body or by making it close-fitting to accentuate it.

Choosing the size of a shoulder pad or where the waist is accentuated may seem like small decisions to make, but these subtle choices about silhouette give your clothes a unifying identity and stop them from becoming generic shapes. For example, Alexander McQueen's early collections in the 1990s suggested strong female sexuality and power through severe, close-fitted tailoring and shoulder pads that formed right angles to the neck. At a time when other designers were avoiding excessive shoulder pads because of their connotations with the 1980s and early 1990s, McQueen's shoulder line was aggressive and bold.



1 Australian artist, fash and icon, Bowery. (Courtesy of Fergus Greer and Perry Rubenstein Gallery)

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2 'No' Pantsuit by Viktor & Rolf for the Spring/Summer 1999 collection. (Collection Groninger Museum; photographer: Peter Tahl)

3 This cape by Giles for the Autumn/Winter 2004 collection uses shoulder pads to create a shoulder line at right angles to the neck.

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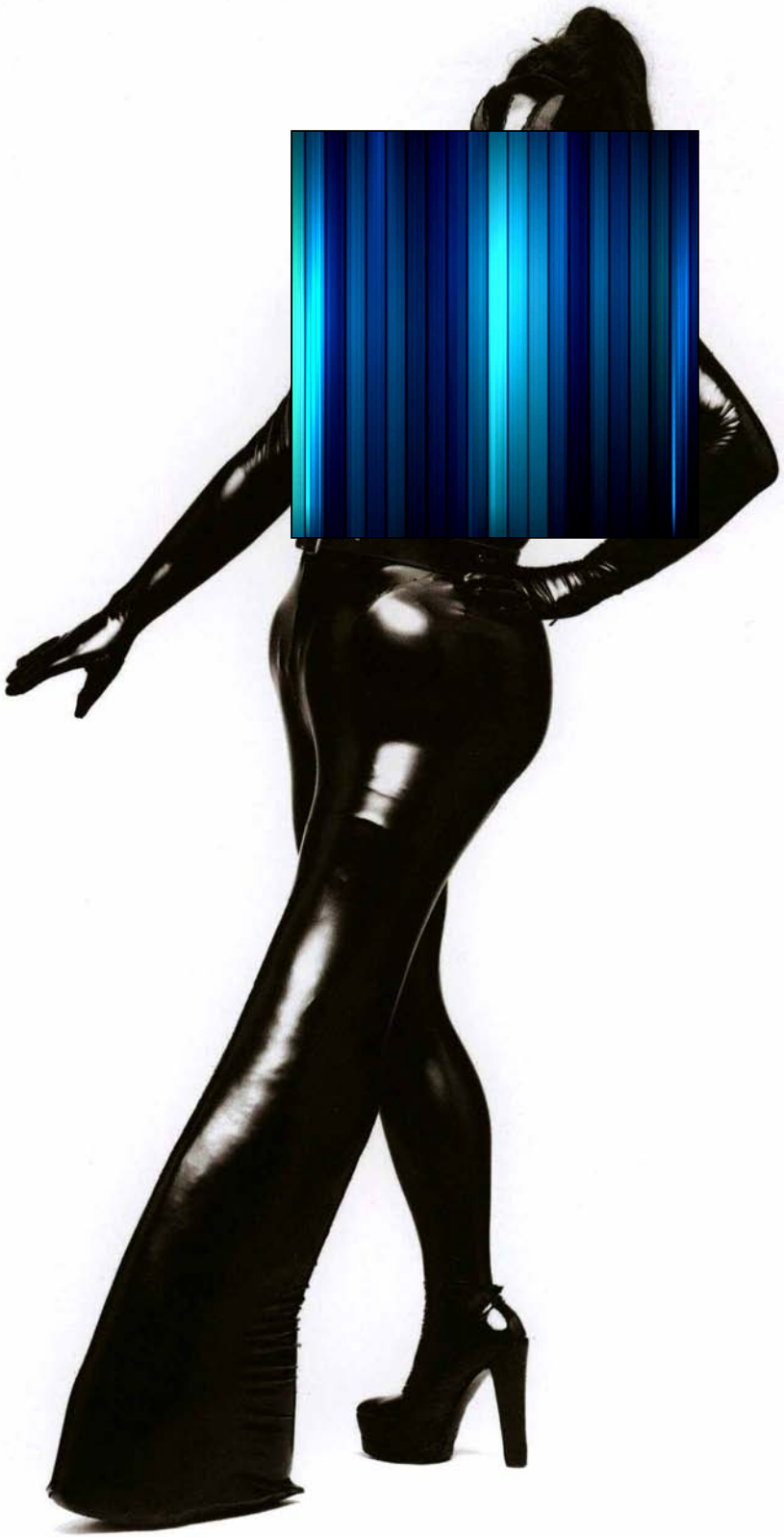
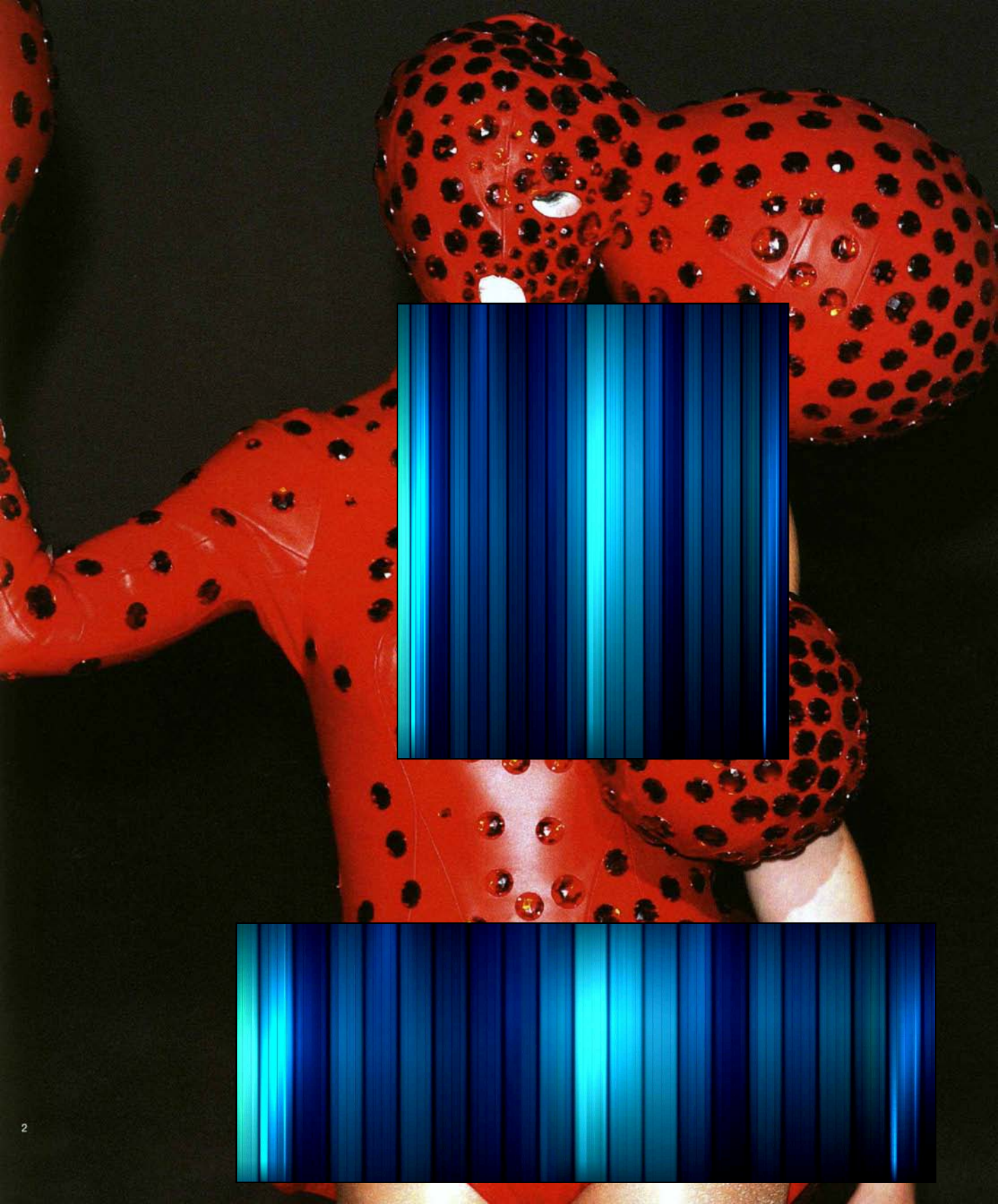
Choosing the subtleties of silhouette and cut is essential, but some designers choose to make bolder statements by working far more sculpturally on the body. Leigh Bowery was an Australian designer and performance artist who died in 1994. He appeared to be completely unconcerned with convention or perceptions of taste, possibly because he never trained formally in fashion design. Bowery constantly experimented with his own silhouette, augmenting and constricting it, using boning, padding and even gaffer tape. He even displaced his own flesh (hence the gaffer tape) so the line between (temporary) body modification and clothing became blurred. Leigh explains: 'Because I'm chubby I can pleat the flesh across my chest and hold it in place with heavy-grade gaffer tape. Then, by wearing a specially constructed, under-padded bra, I create the impression of a heaving bosom with a six-inch cleavage.' (*Leigh Bowery: The Life and Times of an Icon*, Sue Tilley, page 107)

The clothes would often fit because he altered the shape of his own body. Bowery's body was capable of innumerable shapes and forms. 'The idea of transforming oneself gives courage and vigour. It reduces the absurdity, you can do anything dressed like this. I want to disturb, entertain and stimulate. It's more about silhouette alteration than restriction, though I do like that frisson of sexual danger. I like to think that I reform rather than deform the body.' (*Leigh Bowery: The Life and Times of an Icon*, Sue Tilley, page 112)



1 Australian performance artist, fashion designer and icon, Leigh Bowery. (Photograph Courtesy of Fergus Greer and Perry Rubenstein Gallery)

2 The legacy of Bowery's vision can often be seen in the work of contemporary designers: for example, that of Gareth Pugh. This image is taken from Gareth Pugh's Spring/Summer 2006 collection.



For the Comme des Garçons Spring/Summer 1997 collection, down pads were sewn into dresses in irregular places, creating a new silhouette and challenging preconceptions of the body and conventions of beauty by making the wearer look ill-proportioned and deformed.

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Dress by Comme des Garçons for their Spring/Summer 1997 collection.

Viktor & Rolf, haute couture Autumn/Winter 1999–2000 collection, First, Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth and Final Preparation.

This series of nine outfits by Dutch designers Viktor & Rolf was inspired in part by the idea of Russian Matryoshka dolls. The smallest outfit was shown on a model and then the next outfit was fitted over the top. This continued until the model was wearing nine outfits, one on top of the other, and each garment augmented the existing silhouette of the previous outfit. (Collection Groninger Museum; Photographer: Peter Tahl)

2

3 Dress with leather belt by designer Emma Cook for her Spring/Summer 2006 collection. The belt gives the illusion of a raised waist.

Dutch designers Viktor & Rolf explore the sculptural potential of silhouette. Their clothes often parody recognisable forms, historical references and traditional haute couture, but with fresh vision and humour. Scale and volume are taken to extremes, and in so doing they display their mastery over construction and tailoring and an understanding of the symbolic value of clothing.

3

Proportion and line

The proportions of a garment develop from the silhouette. If the silhouette is the overall shape of the garment then proportion is how the body is divided up either through lines (horizontal, vertical, diagonal or curved) or with blocks of colour or fabric. Every time we shop for clothes or get dressed we are playing with the perceptions of our own proportions. How and where we break up our bodies with horizontal hem lines, trouser widths, necklines and the position and emphasis of the waist depends on what flatters us.

The line of the garment generally refers to its cut; where seams and darts are placed on the body and the effect they have visually. Confusingly, some designers will refer to the line of a garment when they actually mean silhouette.

The important thing to remember about any lines that are created on clothes is that they must be judged visually and balanced against each other and any other details – for example, openings, necklines and pockets in the vicinity.

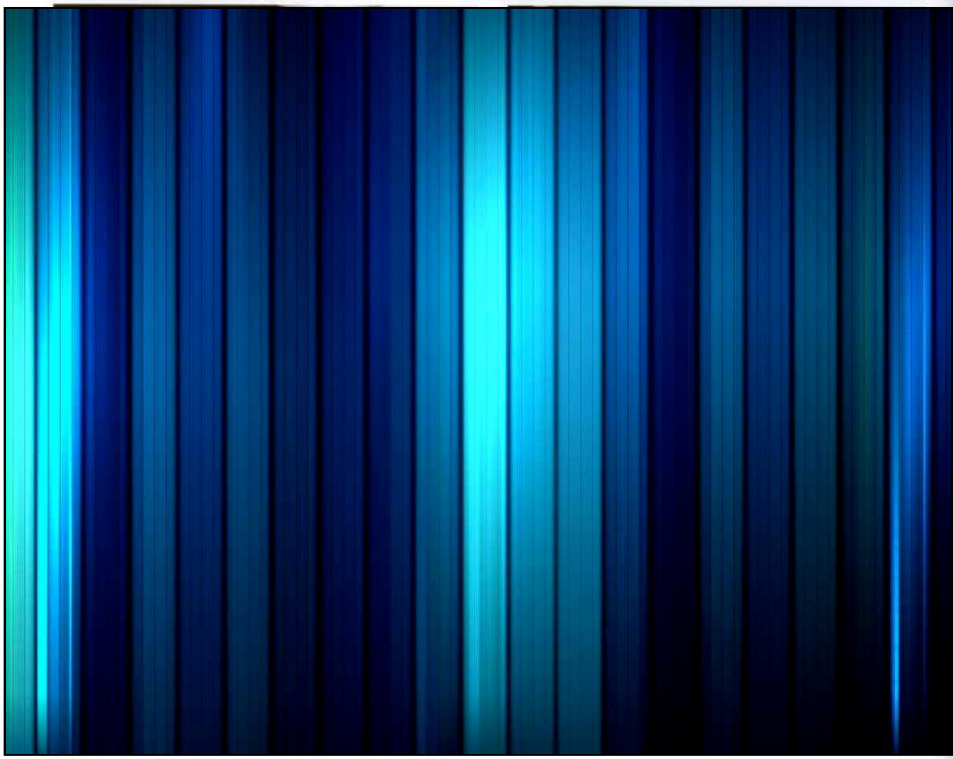
General rules

- Vertical lines lengthen the body.
- Horizontal lines emphasise width.
- Straight lines are perceived to be hard and masculine.
- Curved lines are considered to be soft and feminine.
- Seams and darts are not standard and can be moved around the body.
- Garments can be of any length, creating horizontal lines across the body.
- Layers of clothing create multiple lines.

1 The curved seams of this Balenciaga outfit from Spring/Summer 2004 give the impression of an hourglass silhouette.

2 This Lanvin dress from Autumn/Winter 2006 creates a trompe-l'oeil silhouette using line and blocks of colour.

3 The white lines of the seams, darts and edges of this Chanel jacket from Autumn/Winter 2005 exaggerate the effect such lines have on the body. The darts in particular help to suggest a narrow waist.



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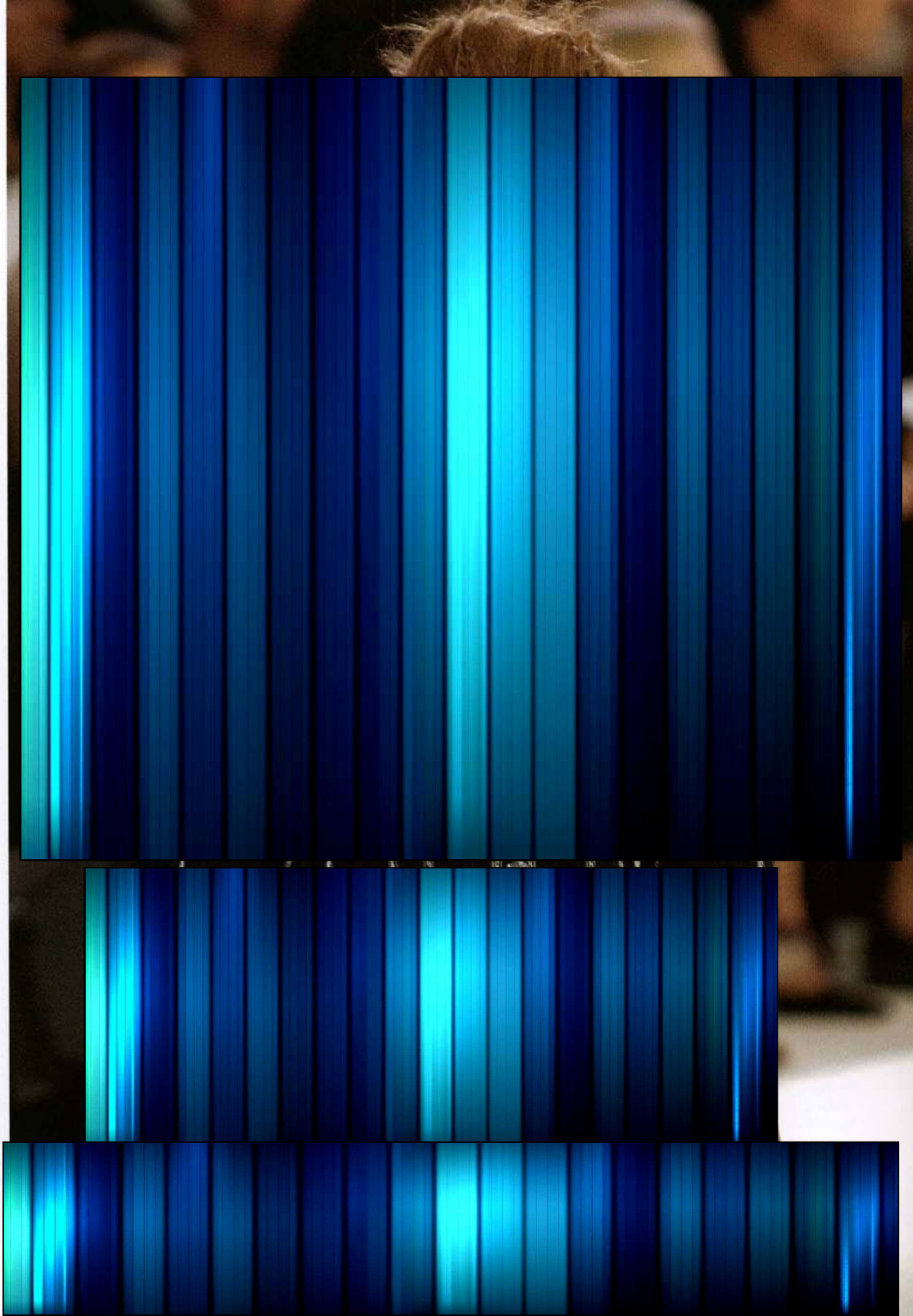

God is in the details

An outfit can have a dramatic silhouette and good line, but without great detailing it can seem amateur and unresolved. Outfits that lack detail can survive on the catwalk, but will not bear close scrutiny – for example, on the rail in a shop. Details in clothes are often the clincher when it comes to persuading someone to part with their money. Detailing is particularly important in menswear, where outlandish silhouette, line, fabric and pattern are off-putting to what is a largely conservative clientele.

Details are practical considerations: which fastening to choose, which type of pocket to have and how much topstitching to use. Clever use of detail can also be used to give a collection of clothes a unique identity, a signature; cutting a pocket in a particular way, using an embellishment in one area of a garment or the finishing of an edge can help to differentiate the garments of one designer from those of another.

Pocket types and fastenings can sound a little mundane, but choosing these things doesn't have to be like shopping for items from a catalogue. Although a pocket, for example, has a generic function, and the concept is fixed, it doesn't mean that how it is conceived has to be formulaic. There are rules about how certain pockets are made and how certain pockets look, but these notions can be distorted and reinvented. Fashion rules are made to be broken.

1

1 Magician Coat by British designers Boudicca for the Autumn/Winter 2005 collection. The front has a 'fake' rever collar that is seamed in. The cuffs are 'striped' with top-stitching, as are the small circular panels on the shoulders. The line of the fringed circle gives the effect of epaulettes.

2 Explode Pocket shirt and Pocket One jacket, Spring/Summer 2005, and Simulation skirt, Autumn/Winter 2005, all by Boudicca. Both shirt and jacket have suspended pockets. The shirt has an 'exploding' collar and the jacket has multiple vents at the back of the sleeves.

2

Fabric, colour and texture

You must understand the different varieties and qualities of fabric before you can apply them to a design. If the fabric is already in front of you, then knowing what you can design with it is paramount. For example, chiffon won't make a tailored jacket as well as a wool fabric, and leather does not drape well.

Fabric choices are often dictated by your theme and season. Your theme may suggest a mood or colour palette that can then be interpreted into fabric. The season you are designing for directs the weights, and, to a degree, the textures. Lighter fabrics tend to be used more in Spring/Summer collections and heavier fabrics, suitable for outerwear, tend to be used more for Autumn/Winter. Season can also influence colour. Lighter colours are often used more in Spring/Summer and darker tones for Autumn/Winter. The feel and drape of a fabric will guide you as to what type of garment you can make with it – and this familiarity will buy you experience.

The way you choose to use colour is generally an issue of personal taste and there are few rules, although some combinations should generally be avoided. Red and black together can look clichéd. Traditionally, black and navy should not be worn together, but this is no longer a hard-and-fast rule. Too many primary colours can look garish or cheap, though in the right hands it can work, often by complementing them with a more subdued colour. Some colours don't work next to certain skin tones. Beige and other 'flesh' tones can make skin look pink or red. Using a small amount of a colour as a highlight or accent when contrasted with other colours can have a stronger impact than using large blocks of competing colour.

1

1 Dresses by Vinti Andrews.

2 Scarf by Missoni.

3 The Italian company Missoni is known for its knitwear. Here, pastel colours are balanced by the use of neutral and dark tones.

I try to draw from day to day. Things I find and things I see...I'm trying to define a style that has nothing to do with fashion; it's more about individuality. ’

Jens Laugesen talking to Alexander McQueen

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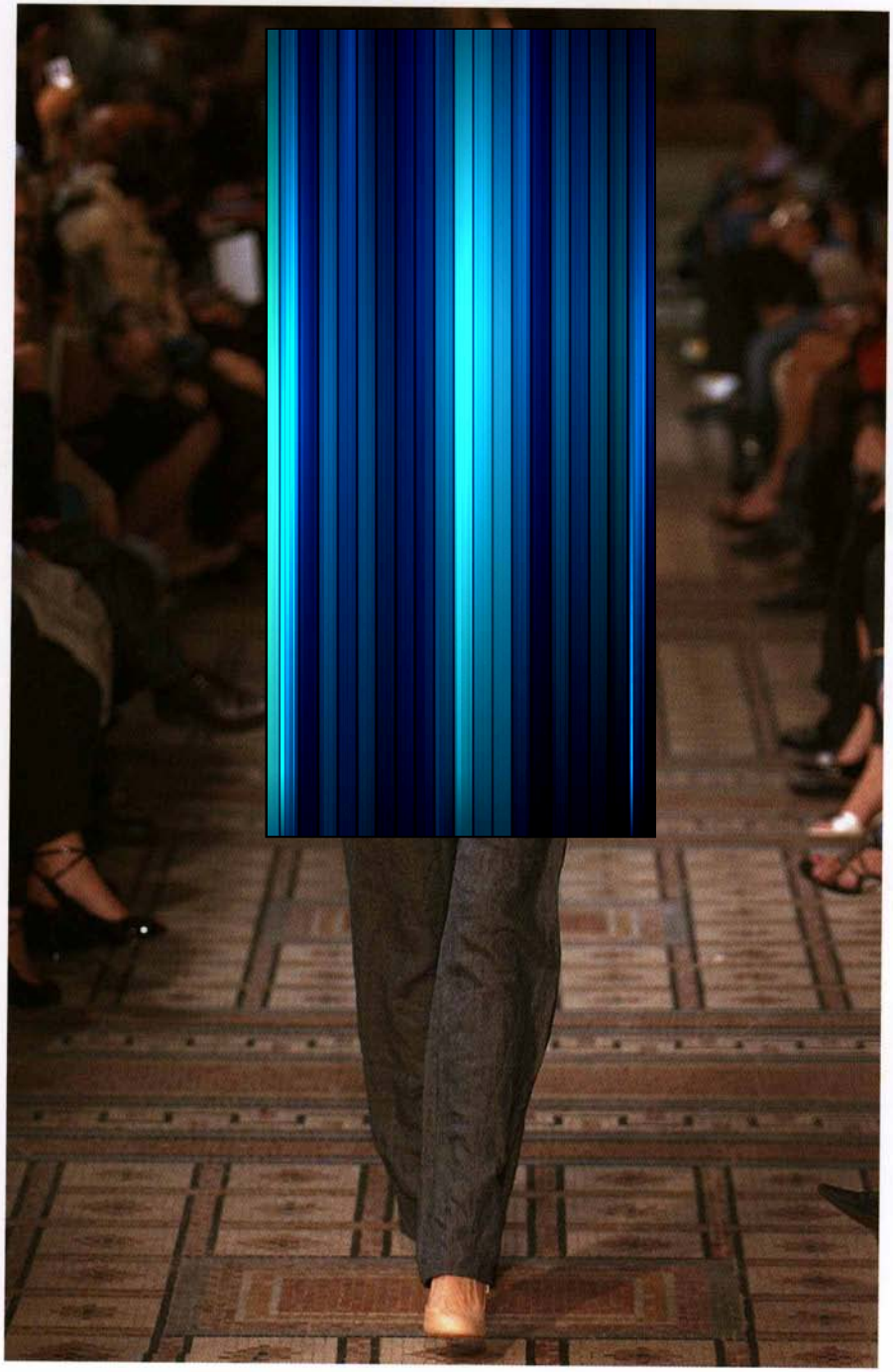

Each season tends to highlight specific fashionable colours. Trend forecasters predict which colours will be prevalent by analysing catwalk shows and making an overview of that season's most popular colours. Some colours are enduring, however. Black tends to be constantly in fashion as it is slimming and can easily be worn with other colours. Certain colour palettes become synonymous with certain designers. For example, Helmut Lang and Jil Sander typically use blacks, greys, muted colours and neutrals. Designers also make use of certain patterns as part of their signature. Paul Smith has become associated with a certain candy-stripe pattern and Missoni is known for its knitted zigzag.

You should develop a range of colours and fabrics when designing. Any initial colour and fabric choices might need building on to fill in gaps. For example, a choice of five colours or fabrics may need an additional two to make the palette flow. Initial fabric choices may not have the breadth of weights and textures necessary to design a variety of clothing.

1

1 This outfit by Anne Valerie Hash for Spring/Summer 2006 breaks up the body into distinct blocks of colour. The proportional use of colour makes the top half of the body appear smaller in comparison to the bottom half.

2 An initial range of fabrics has been collected in this research book by Benjamin Kirchhoff.

'Some people focus on retro, meaning sixties and seventies revivals. Some people stick to very traditional classic clothing, what we call "real" clothes, very easy to put on, simple clothes. I wanted to create something that didn't belong to any of those categories, and go forward.'

Rei Kawakubo, the weekend *Guardian* magazine 1st March 1997

2

Rendering your ideas

Drawing is a tool with which to communicate your design ideas – literally, getting what's in your head on to paper. Ideas can be worked out three-dimensionally on the stand, but even this method of designing requires development on paper at some stage.

It is not essential to be great at drawing to be a good designer, but it helps. Drawing can be an intimidating activity, especially if you're out of practice. The thing to remember is that unless you plan on being a fashion illustrator, it is the design that is most important, not the drawing. Practice and repetition is the key to improving drawing skills, though the repetition itself should be thoroughly interrogated; a bad habit or mannerism can become automatic if you are not actively thinking about what is being rendered; a claw shape where the hand should be becomes less hand-like the more you lose your objectivity.

As a designer working primarily with the body, it would be useful for you to undertake some life-drawing classes at some stage. Drawing the naked human body will help you to understand anatomy, musculature and proportion, as well as how the body works in terms of balance and stance. Drawing a dressed form is useful, too, in order to understand how clothes work on the body. Both exercises require you to use art media and to experiment with mark-making. Incidentally, 'mark-making' means how the art materials are used to put ideas down on paper.

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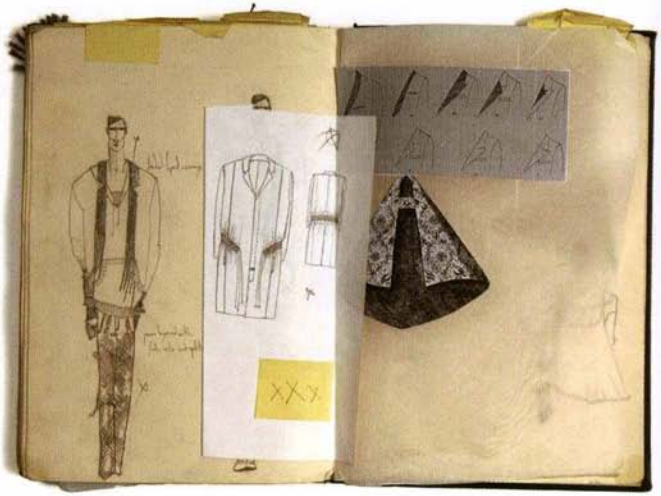


1/2 Examples of fashion drawings found in student sketchbooks.

Fashion drawing versus fashion illustration

It is useful to make a distinction between fashion drawing and fashion illustration. A fashion illustration is not so much about the design, but about capturing the spirit of the clothes. Illustration can be used to express a mood or give the clothes context by setting a scene where the clothes might be worn or representing the kind of person who might wear the clothes through styling, make up, hair and pose. A fashion illustration does not need to show the whole of a garment unless it is used in a portfolio in which a design has not been made up into a real outfit or garment. With the latter, the illustration takes the place of a photograph, showing how the garment would look on the body.

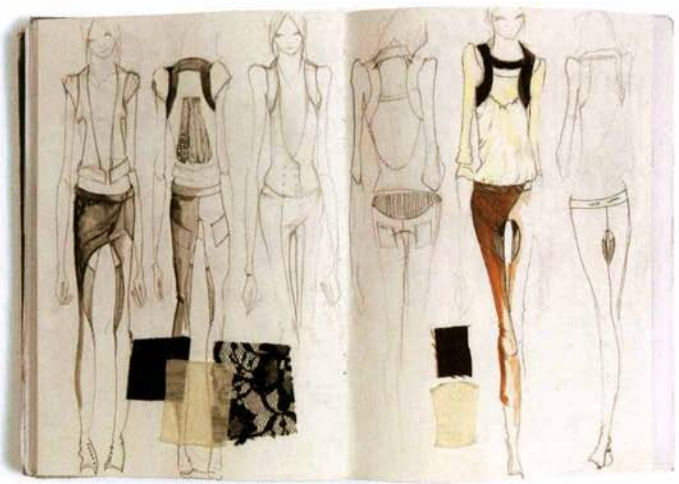
Mark-making and the use of varied art materials is much more important in fashion illustration than in design. The best mark-making is that which is confident, fluid and full of movement, and this is something you can develop over time. Use multimedia art materials for more layered, interesting images. Different types of art materials can also help to express different textures of fabric.

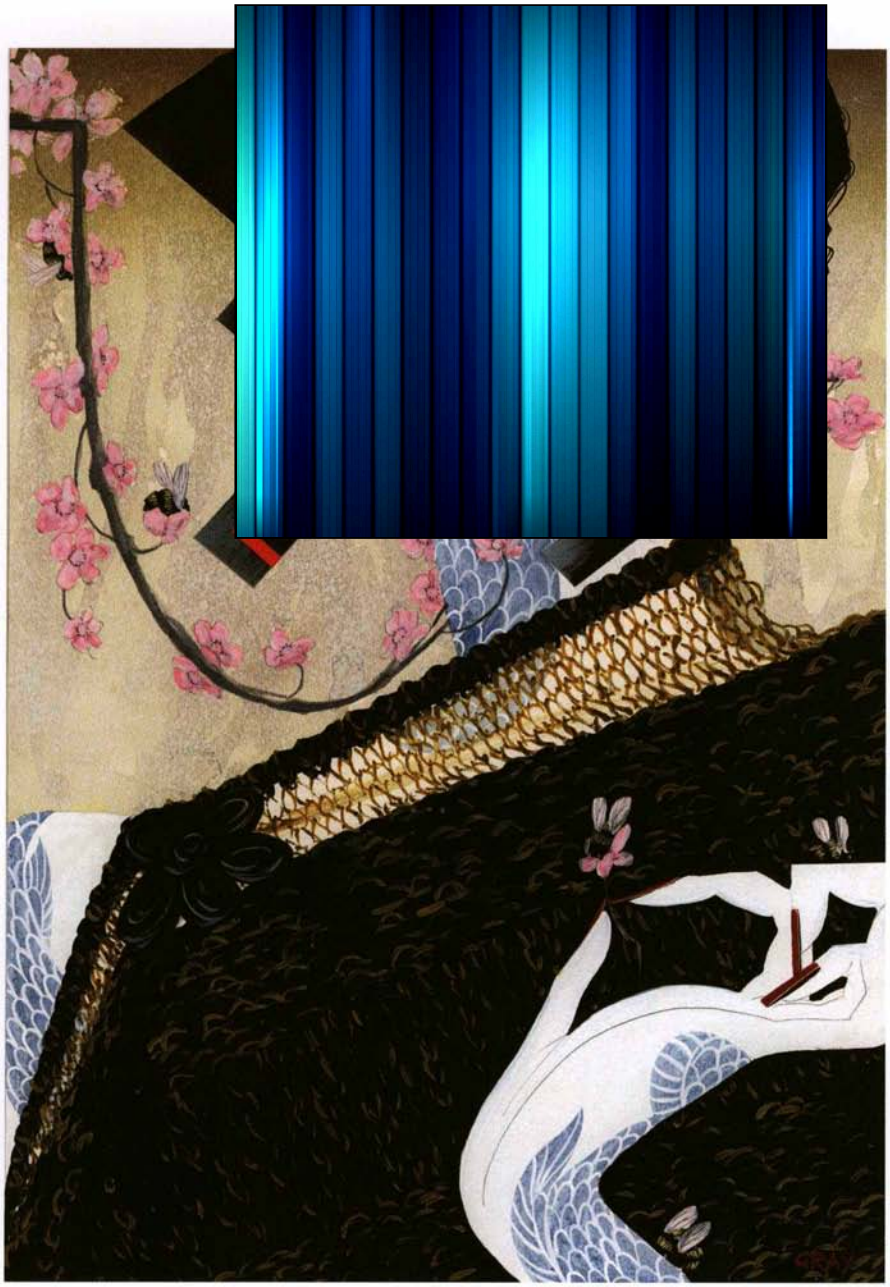
A fashion drawing is about communicating your design ideas, although it can also be about capturing the spirit of the clothes. A fashion drawing is a figurative form that is used to get ideas down quickly. It doesn't need to be fancy or the best drawing you have ever done. What it does need to be is fairly proportional; it has to bare a convincing resemblance to a 'real' human form. If the proportions of your drawing are too abnormal this will follow through to the proportions of your designs; what looks good on a figure that has too-long legs won't necessarily look good on a real person. Although anything looks good on someone with long legs, which is why long legs work well on the catwalk.

A fashion drawing also needs to be a fairly fast drawing; in an ideal world, when the creative juices are flowing, ideas come to you rapidly and need to be put down on paper quickly before they are forgotten. And forgotten they will be, because the mind has a habit of moving on to other ideas. As you draw your designs, try to put down colour and fabric as often as possible; your designs are not only about silhouette and detail, but about colour and fabric, too.

Fashion drawing and illustration are not solely about rendering the human form in a realistic manner. Some fashion drawings are so stylised they seem to rely little on a real human figure, rather they rely on a knowledge of fashion drawing itself (in other words, referencing other fashion drawings) and some fashion drawings become more like cartoons. With practice, your fashion drawing will eventually take on a character of its own and become as individual as your signature.

2





‘Fashion illustration is as exciting and expressive as each illustrator’s individual artistic interpretation of a designer’s idea. Whether it is an illustrator’s decision to focus on the detail, the silhouette, a narrative story or the flourish of a quick sketch of the design being drawn, it can be something which captures the spirit of a collection with the signature of another artist’s eye and hand. As technology develops, the fashion illustrator has the choice to work with the purity of craft: pencil, pen, paintbrush, crayon, biro, collage, paint, airbrush, ink, or computer artistry – or to combine the two. The choice of focus and technique is as unlimited as an illustrator’s imagination. The uses of fashion illustration can vary from the freedom of the illustrator’s personal response in editorial work to the specific directions suggested by a creative brief. If the illustration is to be used within a commercial capacity, for example a fashion designer’s marketing, advertising or packaging, it can be a way of developing a corporate identity with the flair of artistic expression.’

Richard Gray, fashion illustrator

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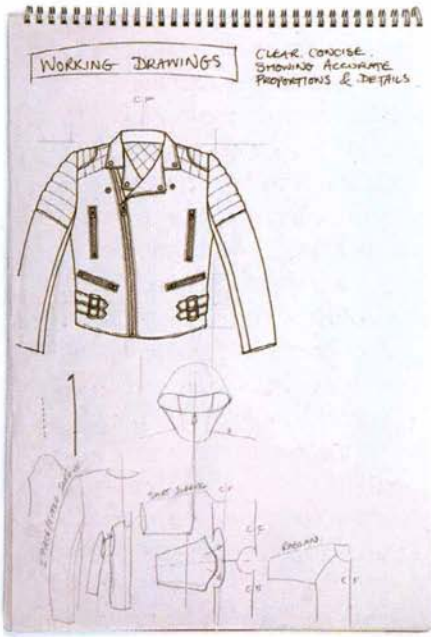
1 Fashion illustration by Richard Gray

2 Working drawing of a motorcycle jacket.

3 Examples of templates.



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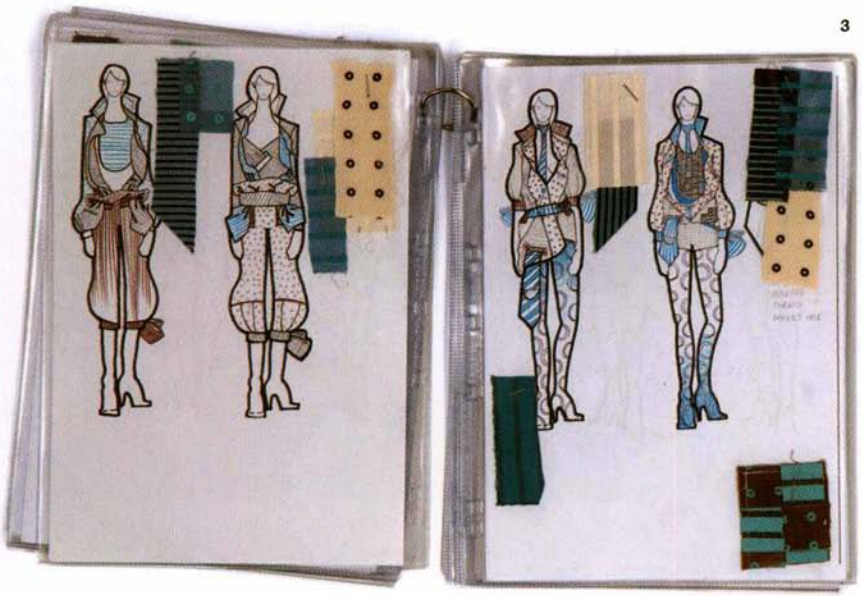
Templates

Design drawing is about speed; getting your ideas on to paper as quickly as possible before you forget them. If you are a beginner, you can use templates of pre-drawn figures which can then be traced through layout paper (or any other transparent paper), speeding up the process of designing. Templates can be found in 'How to do Fashion Illustration/Drawing' books or can be developed from your own drawings. It is preferable to develop templates from your own drawings to keep them individual. But, be warned: if you rely too much on templates it will mean that your freehand fashion drawing will suffer through lack of practice.



3

Working drawings

When drawing designs, you might include little artistic flourishes that have little to do with the design, but are more to do with mark-making or how you imagine the fabric to fold and move. You may also have unresolved issues, such as fastenings, topstitching, seams, darts, etc., and these issues need to be addressed at some point. This can take place during pattern-cutting and making the toile, but if someone else is going to cut the pattern for the garment these issues need to be addressed sooner rather than later.

Working drawings – also called technical drawings, specifications ('specs') or 'flats' – are flat drawings of the garment, front and back, as if the garment is laid out on a table, showing all its details and accurate proportions. Working drawings are line drawings only; they are purely about structure and detail. Many are executed with a black fine-line pen. One pen (for example, 0.8mm width) may be used for outline, seams, darts and details (depending on what they are) and a finer pen (for example, 0.3mm width) can be used for topstitching.

There are two methods of representing topstitching: as a continuous fine line, which, in fact, it is, or more commonly as a dotted or dashed line. If using the latter method make sure that the dots or dashes are neat, regular and dense or it gives the appearance of large, crude hand-tacking stitches.

You may also use a fine line for buttons, press-studs or other details; there is no one rule, and as long as you are communicating the garment accurately there should not be any problem.

In industry, the drawings are given to a pattern cutter so that he or she can cut the pattern for the design. The drawings should communicate the design accurately so that the pattern cutter doesn't have to second-guess any aspect, so they must be well thought-through. Working drawings are also useful for the sample machinist to help with construction when there is no toile available.

Which media?

Designing on paper is about communication. Colour and fabric are integral to the design, so the more accurately they are represented the more successful the rendering of the design. Learning to understand and use at least one type of paint is very useful; this will enable you to mix colours to gain the most accurate effects. Speed can also be a factor in your choice of art media; coloured pencils and marker pens are by far the easiest to use in terms of translating an idea on to the page.

Each designer has a favoured choice of art material, but don't decide too early on without trying out as many different kinds as possible. Experimentation is the key and using different combinations of materials can yield interesting effects. The following list includes some of the art materials commonly employed for design work. It is not definite, but should provide you with a good starting point.

Paintbrushes (1)

Only use good quality ones made from sable or other natural hairs; cheaper brushes start to 'flare' very quickly making neat painting difficult. When cleaning your brushes use soap to get all residue of paint out of the hairs – and never leave a paint brush standing in a glass of water or the hairs will bend permanently.

Magic markers (2)

Superior-quality felt tips, but without the scratchy marks that are characteristic of cheap felt-tip pens. The colour dries flat, and once dry can be given subsequent layers for a slightly darker tone.

Fine-line pens (3)

These are used for working drawings, but can also be employed to put an outline around a fashion drawing.

Clutch pencil and lead (4/5)

Using a clutch pencil is preferable to a normal pencil because the lead is always fine. The leads are graded according to how relatively soft or hard they are. For example, H leads are hard and B leads are soft. HB falls somewhere in between. For design drawing, leads between HB and 3B are preferable. For pattern-cutting a harder lead, between HB and 3H is best.

Pencil sharpener (6)

Used to sharpen normal pencils to achieve a fine point.

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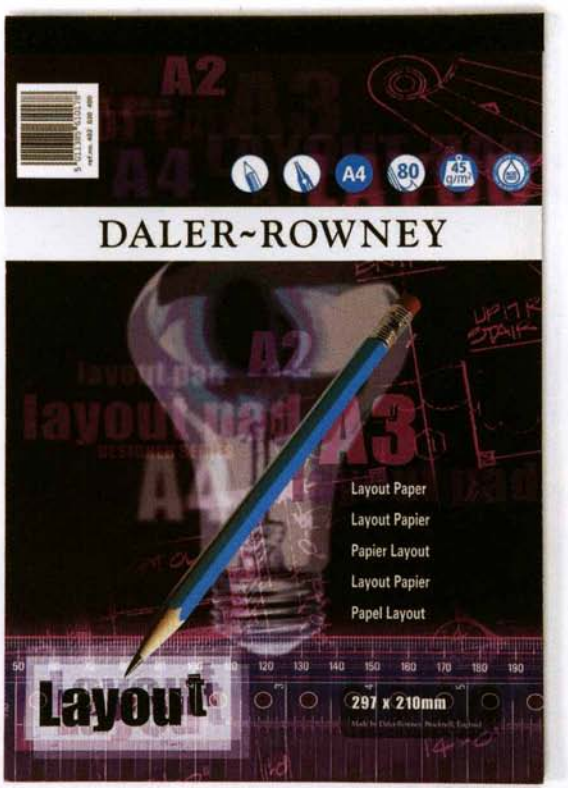

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Putty rubber (7)

This is a good eraser for getting rid of pencil smudges and grubby fingerprints. It can also be moulded into a fine point and is therefore more controllable than hard erasers.

Water-soluble colouring pencils (8)

These are quick and easy to use as long as you don't insist upon colouring everything in heavily as this will make your wrist ache and your pencil shrink! It is a tonal art medium. Water-soluble coloured pencils behave like a (slightly inferior) watercolour when water is applied by brush.

Adhesive glue stick (9)

Adhesive glue sticks are drier than most glues which stops paper from buckling. Another advantage is that if something is stuck down and you want to reposition it, the glue is tacky enough to enable you to do so.

Acrylic paint (10)

Unlike gouache, acrylic paint does not dry flat; it retains brush marks and texture.

Gouache paint (11)

This is an opaque paint that should be mixed to the consistency of yoghurt. Its opacity allows for lighter colours to be painted on top once the original layer is dry. It has a matt, slightly chalky finish and dries a shade or two lighter than wet. It can be used tonally, moving from light to dark (and back again) by watering it down, but is more commonly used to 'block in' colour of one tone.

Watercolour paint (12)

A transparent paint, generally used on watercolour paper – a heavy, textured cartridge paper. Because watercolour paint is transparent if it is used on any paper other than white, the paper colour has a tendency to show through, effectively mixing the paint with the colour of the paper beneath. Watercolour is used tonally and the intensity of colour is directed by how much it is diluted with water. With watercolours, your aim is a fluid technique, so keep the brush wet and learn to work quickly.

Layout paper (13)

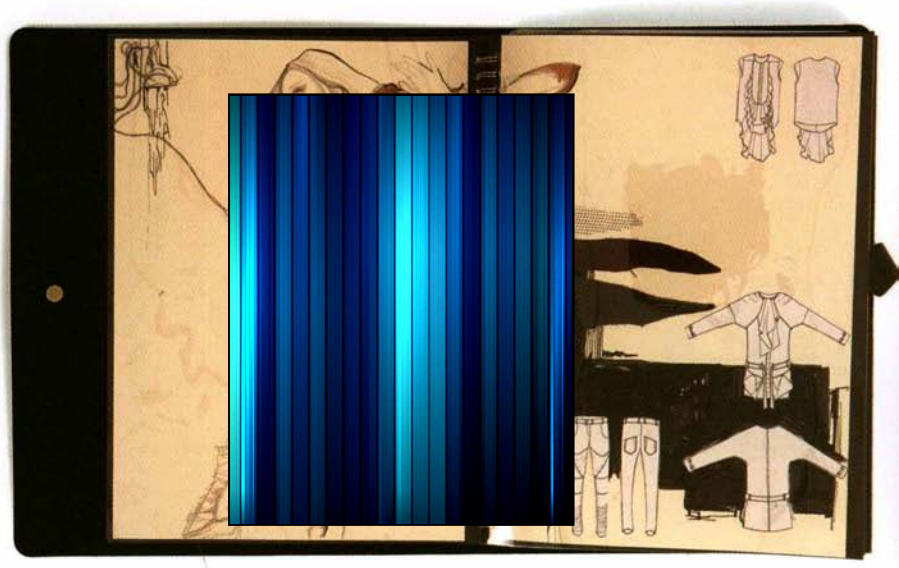
Slightly transparent paper that is used in conjunction with templates. It is not recommended if you want to use an art medium that requires water as the paper is too fine and will buckle.

Portfolios

The graduate portfolio

The result of each assessment during, and upon completion, of a fashion degree course is a portfolio of work. Together with research sketchbooks, this is what you show to prospective investors, employers, stylists and journalists in order to pique their interest.

Your graduation portfolio will include fashion drawings, fashion illustrations, working drawings, fabric swatches, mood-boards, fabric-boards, photographs of actual garments and outfits. There might also be samples of details, including examples of embroidery or a particular method of finishing a garment.



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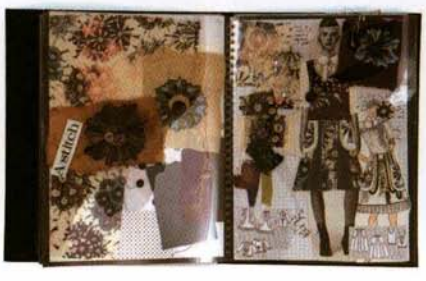
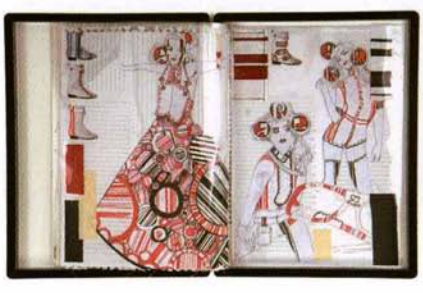
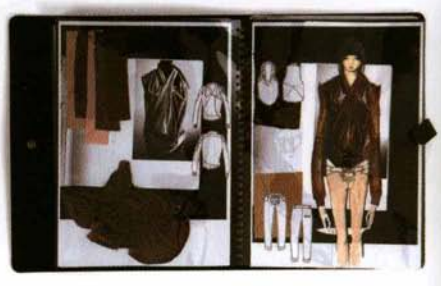






1 Examples of student portfolios. 2 Portfolios can also be specially made. This one is made from layers of acrylic and the surface has been etched into. 3 Pages from UK designers Boudicca's press portfolio, where press is collected and used as a promotional tool.

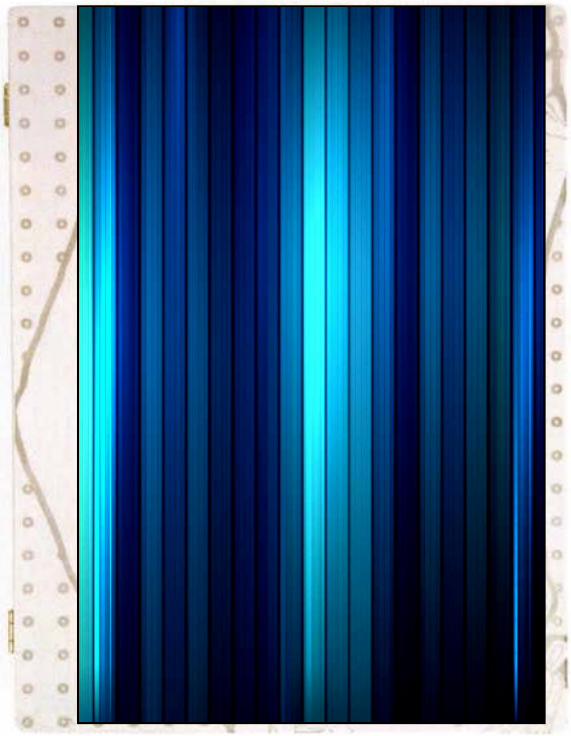
An independent designer's portfolio

As an independent designer, your portfolio will eventually become much more about recording the clothes and the collections you have made. There may be catwalk shots or the results of a shoot styled by you or with a stylist of your collection. The portfolio also becomes an archive for your press cuttings.

An industry portfolio

As a professional designer working for other companies your portfolio will feature work you have designed for your employers, including photos and sketches, as well as press reviews of your design work. Most of the design drawing that you do if you are working for a company will be executed as working drawings, so it is essential that you include evidence of this in the portfolio.

These last two examples of portfolios are very different in content and focus from the graduate portfolio. While they represent a more professional body of work, this does not negate the importance of the graduate portfolio, which is the designer's first step towards a professional approach to a career in fashion design.



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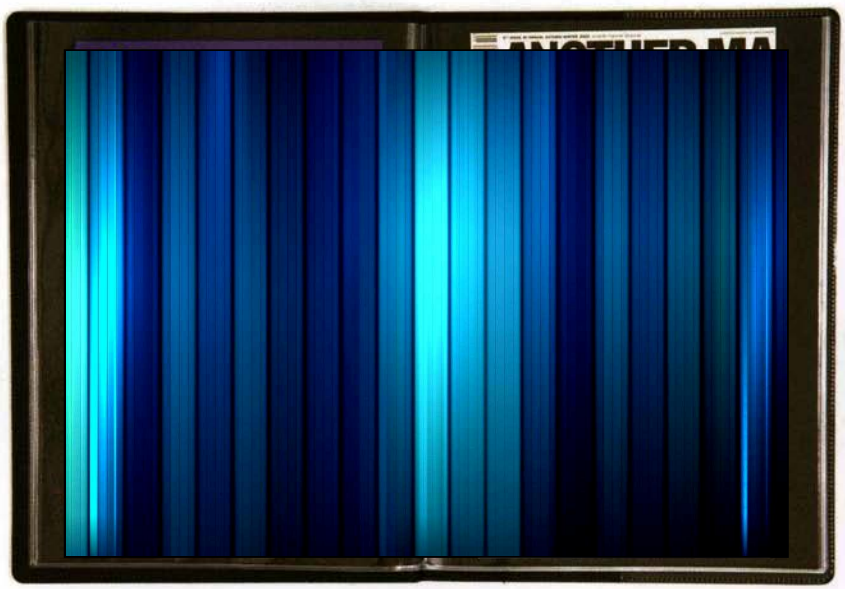

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