

TOOLS
OF THE
TRADE

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MY CRAFT

I'm a maker, I like to get my hands dirty. My approach on fashion often starts by experimenting with materials. I like to search for the boundaries of these materials, what are they meant for, what are they made of and what's the story behind the material? And then of course, the rebel that I am, I like to cross these boundaries and use the materials in a different way than they were meant for. For every project I try explore a technique or tool that is still new to me, like knitting, weaving or working with the lasercutter for example and look for further possibilities to create innovative materials and give a new dimension to it.

This experimenting has helped me discovering where my interest and qualities lie as an aspiring designer. My fascination for materials starts with the old crafts. I like to study these old crafts and old techniques that are used in the history of different cultures.

The details are an artwork on it's own. But it's not just decoration, stories are being told. Craft is a language of material, origins and making.

For me as an aspiring fashion designer, working with my hands brings more advantages as well. It is more time consuming indeed, it takes devotion, discipline and dedication. And at the same time it works very meditative. Working with your hands gets you more involved with your design as you put more time and attention to it, this makes it possible to design during the crafting, go deeper into your work and leaving you more satisfied with the end result as you know the whole process was well thought.

THE SOCIAL VALUE

Clothing is more than a tool to keep us warm and protect our skin, it is also how we interact with each other and our environment.

It's a tool for you to define who you are and where you stand for and share that with the rest of the world. It is a tool for me to reach out to people.

We live in a world now where fashion is the second most polluting industry. Fast fashion is a term for the gigantic fashion chains that are currently flooding the world with a big amount of cheap clothing and rapidly changing fashion collections.

As a result the quality of the clothing is very bad, it is hurting the environment and causing bad labour conditions in countries where the firms are able to produce very cheap. Clothing is becoming very disposable and loses its value.

As an aspiring fashion designer I do see it as a responsibility to think of ways to produce clothes in a more valuable and ecological responsible way. My reaction on the fast fashion industry is to bring back the value in clothes, get people more involved with the design process and the story behind it to create a deeper connection with the garment. It is my goal to change the perception of people about clothing as a disposable product, into clothing as a second skin.

STORYTELLING THROUGH TEXTILES

Stories are a big part of our culture and the influence of storytelling is seen in all aspects of our life.

Traditionally, the oral stories have been handed over from generation to generation. Human began telling tales as soon as they developed the capacity of speech.

Stories were passed on to share knowledge and experience. These could also function to explain natural disasters or other confusing events, like in the time of the ancient Greek where it was common to believe in the stories of gods. Though these ancient tales might seem superstitious or unreal to us, in this time people believed them, and it doesn't differ much from the stories we've been told nowadays about religions and politics.

Jack David Zipes is a professor who has published and lectured on the subject of fairy tales, their evolution, and their social and political role in civilizing processes.

According to Zipes tales are informed by a human disposition to action, to transform the world and make it more adaptable to human needs, while we also try to change and make ourselves fit for the world, making it more suitable for living in peace and contentment. Tales begin with conflict because we all begin our lives with conflict. We are all misfit for the world, and somehow we must fit in, fit with other people, and thus we invent or find the means through communication to satisfy as well as resolve conflicting desires and instincts.

Tales have always been popular and are still relevant today. They are relevant because they always contain a message. This message could offer an alternative way of thinking and reacting in social behaviour. It could give insight into the culture and timespirit. It could function as a warning, it could offer hope. Or be a lesson about general issues we stumble upon in our lives.

J. Zipes - The irresistible Fairy Tale

Evolution of Storytelling and Fairy Tales

For as long as people have made things by hand, they have been telling stories through their handmade work. Storytelling textiles can be found all over the world. During my research I found some different ways of storytelling where the purpose of the artist was a way of mourning, to protest or tell their own story for example.



MOURNING QUILT

In the 1800's quilts were made to preserve the family history. Elisabeth Roseberry Mitchell started this quilt when her 2 year old son passed away. A few years later she added another son who passed away at the age of 19. The quilt shows a graveyard in the center that show the locations where her sons were buried. Every time a child was born into the family, Elisabeth added a coffin around the outer edge of the quilt. When someone died, the coffin would be removed from the edge and reapplied into the graveyard area in the centre together with the date they passed away.

What I find interesting about this piece is that you can feel the pain of Elisabeth and her losses that haunted her for the rest of her life. Every time a new child was born, instead of celebrating, she started embroidering a new coffin to the edge of the quilt.



ARPILLERAS

During the dictatorship of Pinochet in the 70's and 80's, a powerful form of expression was born in Chile. With the military regime a lot of men were imprisoned, killed or just disappeared. The women left behind started making 'arpilleras' in which they tell the stories of their lost man and sons in form political resistance. Because the role of women was very little in the military dictatorship, their products were frequently overlooked as potentially political. The tradition of Arpilleras is still alive today, it has developed as an outlet for expression of the big issues of life. This is an example of storytelling through textiles that is very literally and gives realistic scenery's about the situation of the women and their missing men and sons.



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STRAITJACKET

Agnes Richter was a patient at an Austrian psychiatric institution around 1890. During her time she embroidered her insitutional uniform with words, undecipherable phrases and drawings which documented her thoughts and feelings throughout her time. This jacket became a personal record of her journey and was collected by Hans Prinzhorn, a psychiatrist and art historian who expanded a collection of art made by the mentally ill.

What I find interesting about this piece is that she portrayed her own thoughts and lifestory on her uniform, a uniform that labels people as mentally ill, but through the embroidery it gave a very personal insight in her mind to how she eventually ended up in this uniform.



MODERN RUGS

Faig Ahmed studies the artistic qualities of Azerbaijani traditional rugs. He works with the ancient patterns and ornaments and considers them as words and phrases. Words and phrases that can be read and which he translates to the language of the world we live in now. He partially unweaves the traditional rugs and reconstructs them to create new patterns and shapes. It's a beautiful way to see the transition from traditional to contemporary art in one piece.

PEOPLE WILL
FORGET WHAT
YOU SAID,
PEOPLE WILL
FORGET WHAT
YOU DID,
BUT PEOPLE
WILL NEVER
FORGET HOW
YOU MADE THEM
FEEL.

- Maya Angeloud

Stories are all around us. They inspire us, move us and make us feel alive.

In my work I use the stories that move me as an inspiration for my materials and garments. But it also functions as a tool for me too reach out to people. When a garment/textile has an interesting story behind it, people feel emotionally more connected to the piece and that's what makes it more memorable.

With the use of crafts I want tot give more meaning to textiles and show that it could be more than just a functional object. Craft is very undervalued and unexpected, maybe that makes it such a powerful tool.

THE TECHNIQUE

The craft that I would like to explore for this project is the technique of felt hat making.

Felt is made from wool or fur, by using friction, heat and moisture the fibers interlock with each other making it into a strong fabric.

Hatters use wooden hat blocks, one for the top and one for the band, as a mould to shape the felt. The felt is shaped over the blocks by steaming and compressing the fabric in the desired form.

Once this is accomplished, stiffener is applied to hold it's shape. When dried properly the final stage is the trimming, which means adding a liner, hat band, binding the edge of the brim and adding desired embellishments.

I'd like to explore this technique and experiment with it in fabric to create 3dimensional prints. I always try to find innovative ways to explore traditional crafts and translate them into the modern life we live in now. I let the material tell a story and eventually let the wearer become a part of that story.



THE MAD HATTERS DISEASE

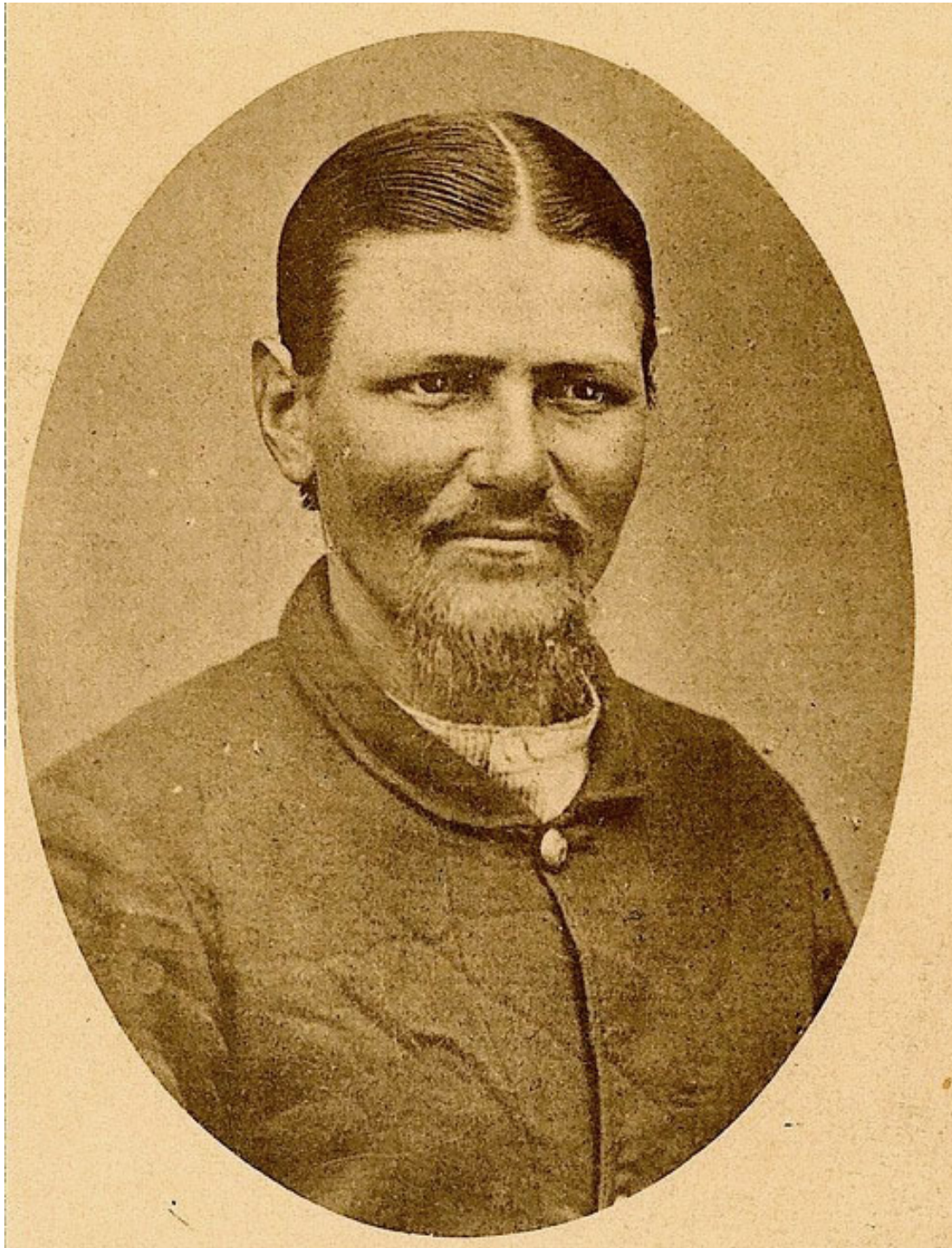
In the 18th and 19th centuries, mercury was a base component in the stiffener that was used to fix the shape of the hat.

The use of mercury had been adopted by the Huguenots in France, even though the dangers of mercury exposure were already known. Hatters were daily exposed to small amounts of mercury and as a result they would often develop symptoms of mercury poisoning, such as; mental confusion, emotional disturbance, lack of coordination, shivers/spasms, dementia, nervousness, insomnia and red nose/eyes/cheeks. They called it 'the mad hatters disease' or 'hatter's shakes'.

These symptoms have been first described in St. Petersburg, in 1829. In France, the National Academy of Medicine described the disease in 1869 and in 1898 (almost 30 years later) a law was written to protect hat makers from the risk of mercury exposure. In America however, it was still legal. By 1934 the U.S. Public Health Service estimated that 80% of American felt makers had the mercurial disease. Even then, the authorities never addressed the issue. Instead, it was the need for mercury in the war that eventually brought an end to the use of mercury in the making of hats.

BOSTON CORBETT

The mad hatters disease is an unexpected powerful story behind the technique of making hats and I would like to use the story as an inspiration to illustrate my textiles. To get a better insight in the disease I searched for people living in that time that were suffering from mercury poisoning and stumbled upon the story of Boston Corbett, that was titled as: 'The guy that killed the guy that killed Lincoln'.



A HATTER IN NEW YORK

Thomas P. Corbett was born in London and immigrated with his family to New York in 1839. Here Corbett started his career as a hatter. In his profession he was regularly exposed to small amounts of mercury, which was the base component in the stiffener that was used to shape hats.

AND THERE BE EUNUCHS

Corbett was married but lost his wife and child in childbirth and began drinking heavily until he eventually lost his job and became homeless. After a period of heavy drinking he was confronted by a street preacher who converted him to Methodism, a christian religion. He became a religious fanatic, preached on the street and started working as a hatter again, where he soon earned a reputation for being a 'local eccentric' and 'The Glory to God man'. In an attempt to imitate Jesus, Corbett began wearing his hair very long.

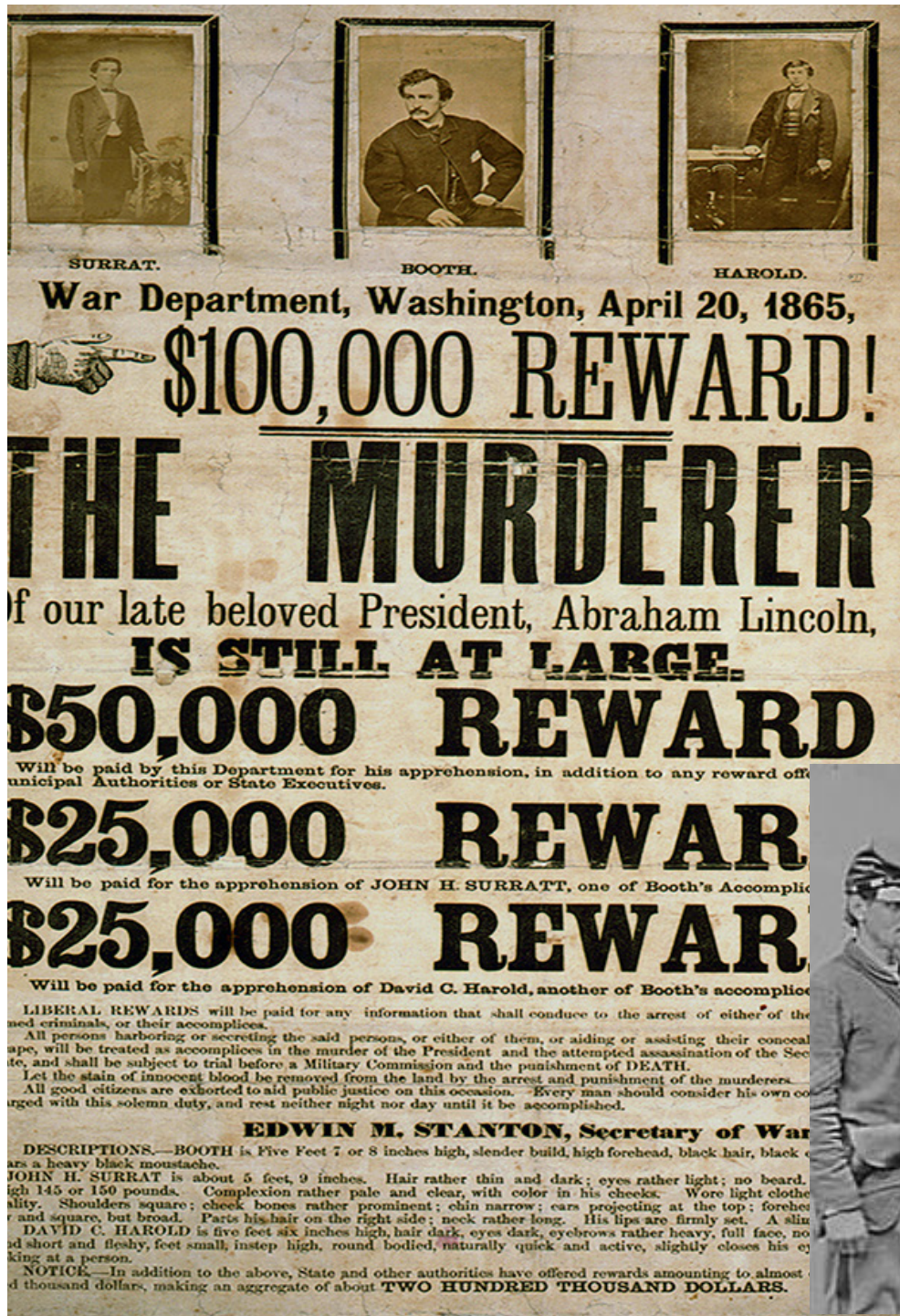
On July 16 1858, Corbett was approached by two prostitutes while walking home from church. He was deeply disturbed by the incident and started reading Matthew 5:32 in the Bible as soon as he returned home. "And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee...and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake".

In order to avoid any sexual attempt and remain holy, he castrated himself with a pair of scissors. After this, he ate his meal, took a walk through the city and went to a prayer meeting before he went to see a doctor for medical treatment.

“And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee...and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake”.

- Matthew 5:32

THE REBEL IS DEAD, THE PATRIOT LIVES




In 1861, American Civil War started and Corbett as a private in the New York Militia.

Corbett's eccentric behavior and undermining his authority, quickly got him into trouble. Due to his behavior and refusal to take orders Corbett was arrested and sentenced to death.

Eventually his sentence was reduced and he was allowed back as a private.

On April 14 1865, President Abraham Lincoln was murdered by John Wilkes Booth. Corbett's regiment was sent to capture his assassin alive.

On April 26 Corbett and his companions found John Wilkes Booth hiding in a tobacco barn where he refused to surrender. The barn was set on fire in an attempt to drive him out, but Booth remained in the barn. Thomas Corbett took matters into his own hands and shot Booth in the head through a large crack in the wall.

Booth declared that God commanded him to do it, God avenged Abraham Lincoln.

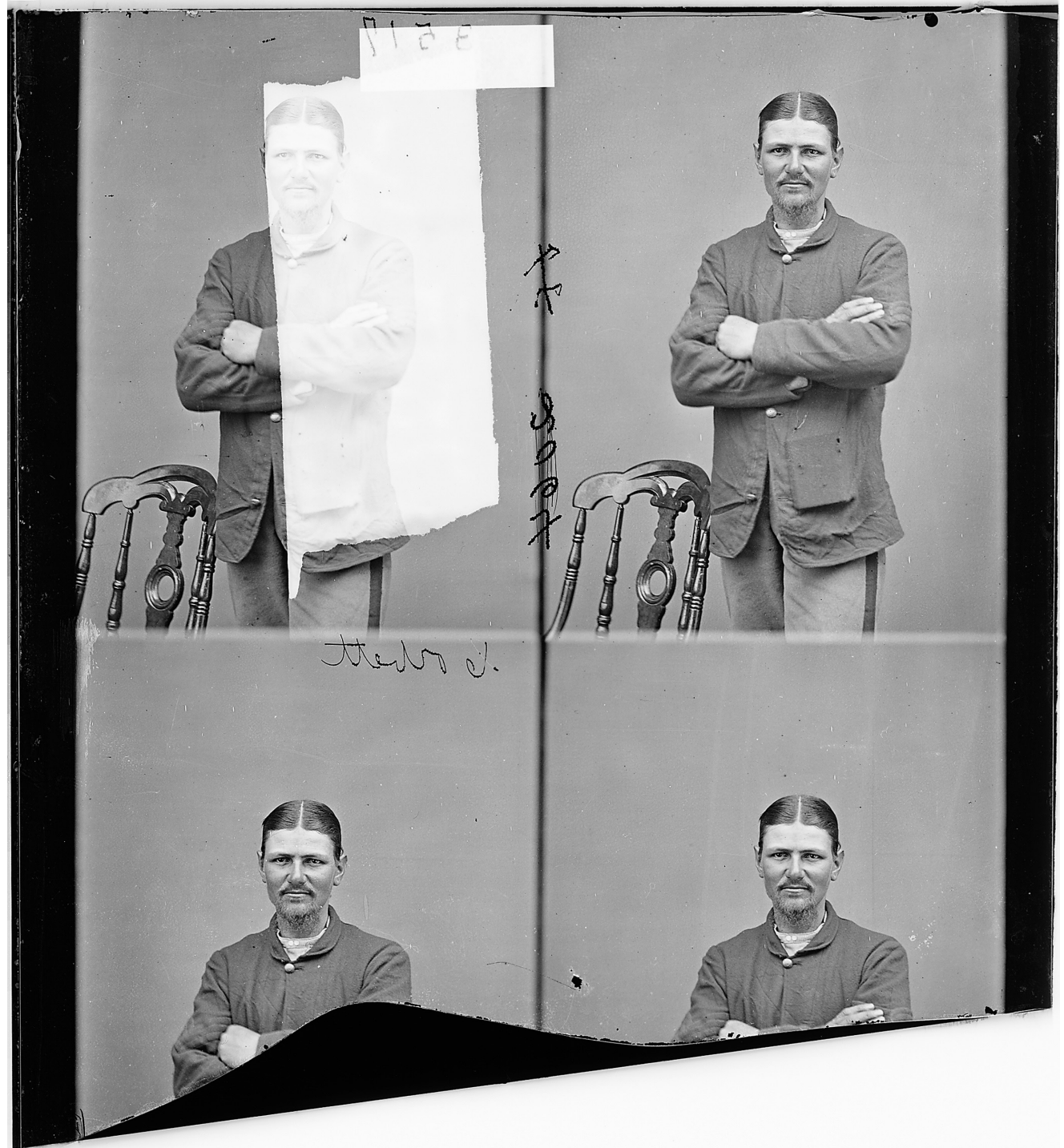
Because Booth was wanted alive and Corbett violated orders he was arrested. During his trial the judge stated: "the rebel is dead, the patriot lives' and Corbett was set free with a reward for killing the Presidents assassin and was considered a hero by the public.

PARANOID

Corbett went back to work as a hatter, but was routinely fired due to his fanatical behaviour and his habit of stopping work to pray for his co-workers.

Corbett started to get paranoid and carried his pistol with him at all times because he believed that 'the Secret Order' was after him for killing John Wilkes Booth. As his paranoia increased, Corbett began pointing his gun at friends or strangers he found suspicious. He even shot at children if they came too close.

After an incident, where he chased several officers with his gun because he was convinced they were discriminating him, Corbett got arrested and the judge declared him insane. The guy who killed the guy who killed Lincoln was sentenced to spend the rest of his days in a mental institution.



My plan is to tell the extraordinary story of Thomas P. Corbett, where I illustrate happenings in his life through 3Dprints in felt, which refers to the technique of hat making. I also want to refer back to the mercury which he was exposed to in his profession as a hatter. And show the effect of mercury on his brain that made him slowly mad until he ended up in a mental institution.

As the story continues, I will add more layers of the events that happened in his life to create more depth in the prints. The more the mercury intoxicated his brain, the more silver I want to add to the prints as well.

THE PROCESS

The first thing I did was experimenting with the hatmaking technique. I gathered some different materials containing wool to see if I could shape them by using steam. I had wools that were constructed differently, I had knitted, woven and felted wool to see how they would form after steaming. As a base I used a face made of foam, I steamed the materials, pulled them over the shape and pinned them down. It is important to let the steam get through the material and pull it firm over the shape.

The thin white felt, which is a combination of wool and polyester, worked perfectly. Polyester hardens when heated, this allows the felt to stay in shape, the mix with wool makes sure the material stays soft. The other felt was too thick to shape more detailed forms, the dark woven wool worked pretty good as well, probably because it was mixed with polyester which gets hard when melted so it could contain the shape. The knitted wool was too delicate and didn't maintain the shape, probably because of the knitted construction, which allows the material to stretch.



TEST TECHNIQUE

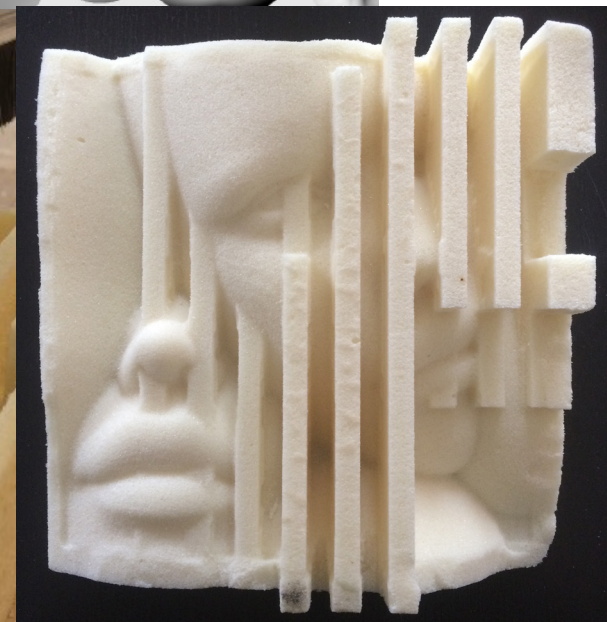
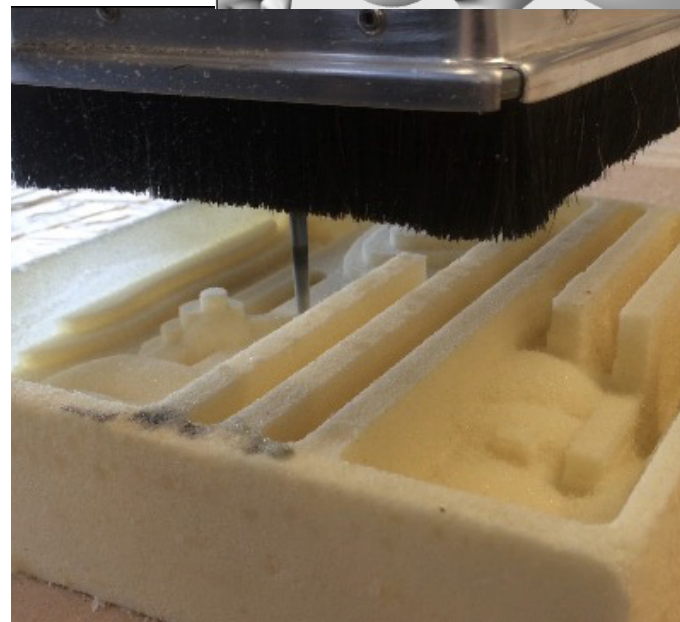
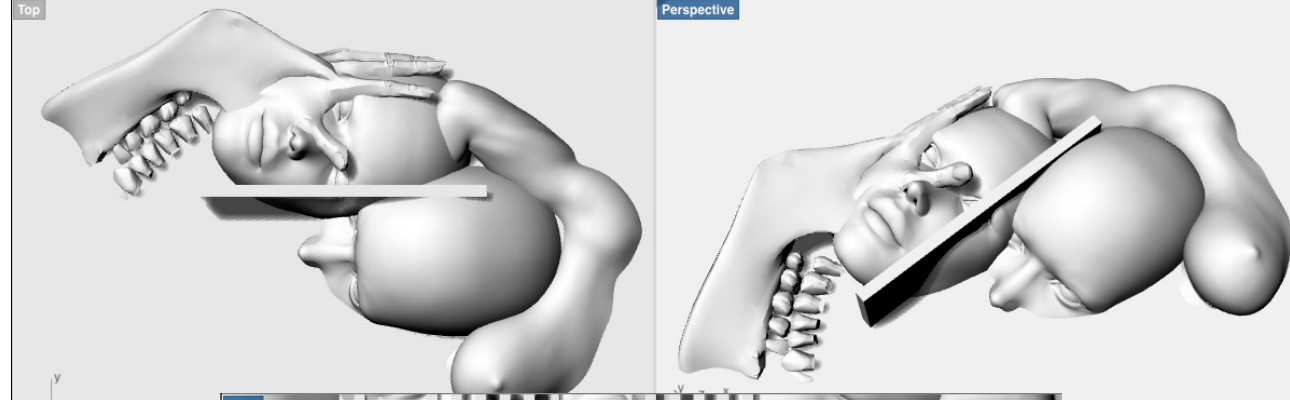
TEST RHINO AND CNC

Now it was time to think about how I was going to shape the material and what tool I would use for it.

My first plan was to make a wooden mould with the CNC-Millingmachine. Which is a computer controlled mill-machine that makes it possible to create complex and precise shapes. The CNC-millingmachine reads 3D surfaces that need to be drawn in a program like Rhino for example.

For my Fantastic Forgeries I started learning to draw in Rhino without having any experience and I wanted to explore Rhino a bit more, since 3D drawing could come in very handy within the fashion field as well.

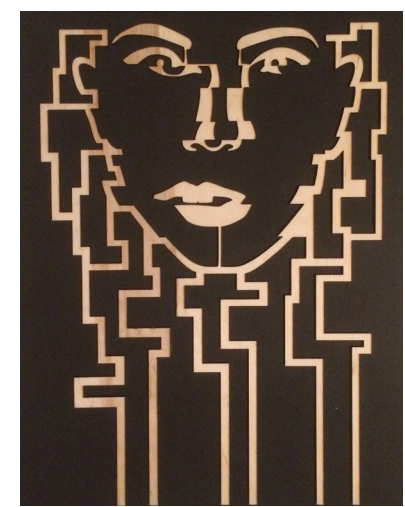
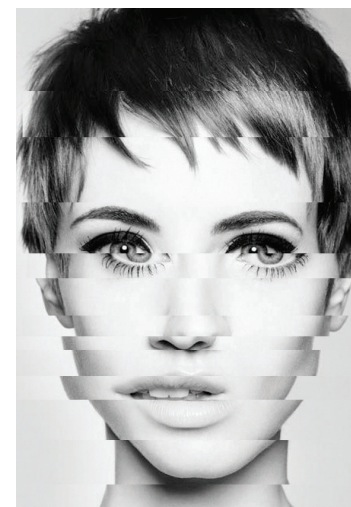
A lot of tutorials and sketches later I had a 3D surface and took it to the CNC-millingmachine for a little test. It turned out that milling in wood was way too much time consuming, due to the complex and detailed shapes and I wasn't allowed to do it in wood. However it was possible to make a test in foam, but even then, this little test of 20x20cm took a full 2,5 hours.



TEST LASERCUTTER

Even though I can draw very precise in Rhino and get a good result with the CNC this was too time consuming. The 3D drawing took a lot of time and milling the whole surface in foam would take 2 days and a lot of persuasion to convince the supervisor to allow me to use the machine for 2 days in a row. But even then, there would be a lot of work in making a mould which I could only use to make one print. That's why I started looking for other ways to make a mould, that would allow me to create multiple prints. I decided to work with the lasercutter, since it works faster and would give me more time to experiment.

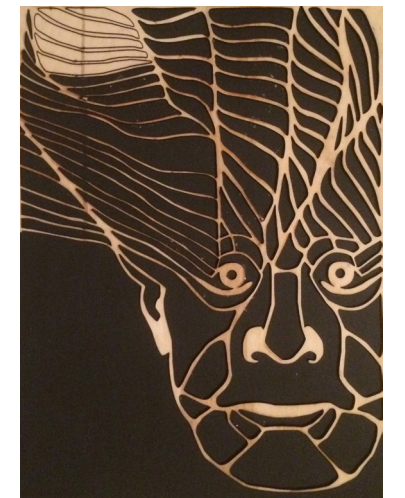
I used a collage method as an inspiration and developed the collages into several prints in illustrator. Each print referred to a symptom of the mad hatters disease.



SHIVERS/SPAMS



INSOMNIA

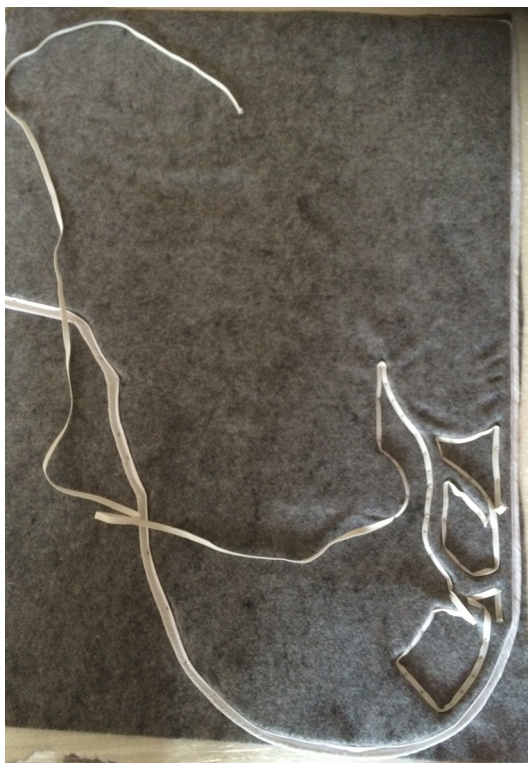


DEMENTIA

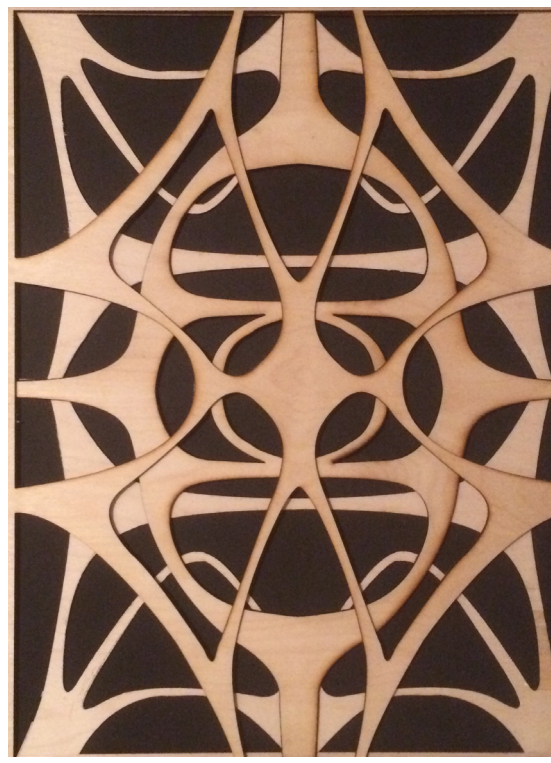
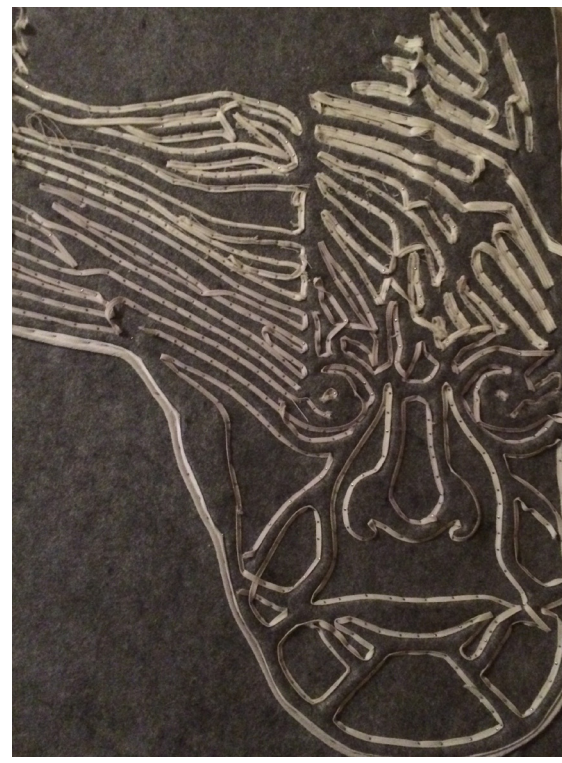
MAKING THE PRINTS



Steaming the felt



While heated, span the felt over the mould and pin it down. I used elastic bands to prevent holes in the fabric. When the felt cools down, it maintains it's new shape and is still flexible. To secure the shape I added a layer of felt starch, the more starch you use, the stiffer the fabric gets.



As a next step I tried different moulds on top of each other to create more depth in the prints. I tried to search for the boundaries of the material and see how small, how sharp and how detailed I could form the felt.



SERIE OF PRINTS

SYMPTOMS OF
THE MAD
HATTERS DISEASE

INVOLVING THE STORY

As a continuation on my project I started to involve the storytelling through textiles more and do some deeper research in both theory and practice.

The story of the mad hatters disease inspired me for the first series of prints, but after my feedback I realised that a symbolic presentation of the symptoms didn't do right to the story and kept the story a bit superficial. I started looking if I could find personal stories of hatters suffering from mercury poisoning in the 18th and 19th century. It was not easy to find personal journals or stories about these craftsmen since most were illiterate during this time. The stories that were written down were mostly about people with a higher status or people with great achievements. Luckily I happened to find the story about Boston Corbett, who's extraordinary story was well known because he killed the assassin of president Lincoln.

I divided his story in 4 periods of his life and illustrated the remarkable events that had taken place during these periods in chronologic order. With these illustrations I want to make 4 prints that illustrate his story using the hatmaking technique. I want to add silver embroidery to the prints as a link towards his eccentric behaviour, that got worse in time due to long term mercury exposure. Therefore I will start with a subtle silver embroidery in the first print and let it pass from print to print where the embroidery gets more severe at the end, the time where Boston Corbett's mercury poisoning is so heavy he ends up in an institution for the mentally ill.

4 CHAPTERS OF THE STORY



A HATTER IN NEW YORK



AND THERE BE EUNUCHS

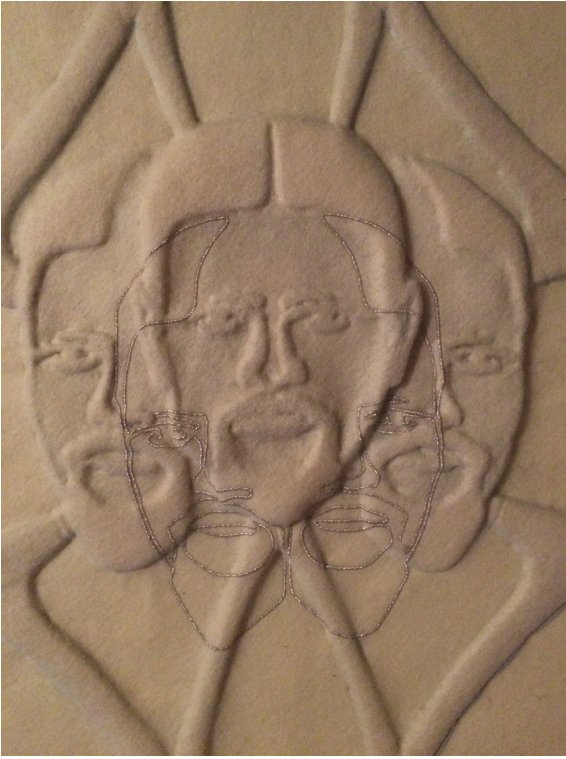


THE REBEL DIES
THE PATRIOT LIVES



PARANOID

COMBINING THE 3D PRINTS WITH EMBROIDERY



At this stage, I have done embroideries on the machine which I combined with the 3D prints. After I have done all the prints I want to continue with embroidery by hand. Starting subtle in the first print and let it cross through the other prints more heavily to show the effects of the mercury poisoning.

CONCLUSION

During this project I learned a lot about an old craft and took that knowledge to use it within my own craft; fashion. Where I combined the old technique with digital techniques to translate an old story into a story of today.

My goal was to give more value to the textile by telling the story behind the craft, using the technique to create several 3D prints in felt, which would give a new dimension to the fabric. By telling stories through textiles I want to get the viewer more involved in the design process so they can create a deeper connection with it.

I got inspired by other examples of storytelling through crafts and saw that it was used as a powerful tool to express emotions, to protest or tell a about culture and origins.

With this story I wanted to tell the viewer about the origins of the craft that I used, but show that there was also a sinister side behind the craft, that was hushed up by the government.

In my previous work I always used stories that moved me as an inspiration for my materials and garments. But this was the first time I used the story and told it through the textile to reach out to the viewer and I believe that when a textile or garment has an interesting story, people feel emotionally more connected to the piece and that's what makes it more memorable.

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