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Research, artistic exploration and development were used to create a thesis body of artwork consisting of six artworks, ranging from print-making /mixed media and sculpture to installation. Aspects of the problems and challenges associated with fast fashion include psychological effects, environmental effects, farming and garment manufacturer/labor effects, and historical changes. The artist sought to create works that would be both beautiful and poignant, inspiring and at the same time address difficult subject matter.

FAST FASHION FIASCO: THE HIGH COST OF CHEAP

by

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Approved by

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Committee Chair

## DEDICATION

To my family, especially my husband Gary and my parents James and Diane

To all my teachers, mentors, and fellow artists

To my West Raleigh Presbyterian Church family

To my mentors: Mary Ann Scherr, Clarence Morgan, Steve Lock, Alison Saar

To all the people who labor in the shadows making our clothes

APPROVAL PAGE

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## CHAPTER I

### PRIMARY PREMISE AND BACKGROUND

The story of my love of textiles starts from a very early age. One of my earliest memories is of my brother and me riding our bikes around my mother's sewing table in our large concrete basement in Oxford, North Carolina. I don't know how she managed to concentrate on her work with our crashes and squabbles. Looking back, I think maybe she sewed because this was one area of life where she had some level of control and could enjoy exercising her creativity. Women in my family had reputations as excellent seamstresses and being very fashionable (in comparison with their small-town 1950s-60s North Carolina peers). They sewed everything from day dresses to church clothes, men's tailored suits to elegant evening dresses.

The only time I recall my mother not enjoying sewing was when she made clothes for my great Aunt Lib. Unlike my family who was lower middle class, she drove a Carmen Ghia convertible, played golf at the country club, and maintained elegant formal gardens at her late 19<sup>th</sup> century two-story Victorian home filled with antique heirlooms and family portraits. It wasn't hard to keep her home in perfect condition since she didn't have children to mess it up. She always selected the expensive Vogue patterns and purchased expensive fabrics like linen, silk, and even leather for my mother to tailor her clothes. My Mom was so afraid she might make a mistake and not be able to afford the fabric she might have to buy to replace her errors. Fortunately that never happened.

As a child I fondly recall weekly trips to the local Belk Leggett department store on Saturdays to pick out patterns and fabrics. It was such a thrill to thumb through the over-sized books of fashion drawings and imagine how I might look wearing the different styles, and it was

only natural that I would want to learn to sew my own clothes at some point. I recall my first sewing lessons (with my Mom) around age 10, making a simple shell blouse. It was much harder than I thought to feed the fabric through the machine and keep the seams straight, but the thrill of wearing my own creations outweighed my frustrations with the learning curve. This firsthand learning and sewing was my introduction to soft sculpture. It instilled in me a love for making and working with my ideas and hands simultaneously, as well as the patience to perform all the repetitive, time-consuming steps: cutting, marking, stay-stitching, ironing, lining, making button holes and inserting zippers. The resulting garments fit much better than store-bought clothes because they could be custom-tailored. And, I might add, these more structured, well-made garments, held up far longer than store-bought clothing. Most were made of 100% natural fibers: cotton, linen, and wool.

I distinctly remember when the first “no-iron” shirts were introduced in the late 1960s. My mother was so excited for my Dad to try them, because it might mean fewer hours spent starching and ironing his 100% cotton, hand monogrammed dress shirts. Alas, these new shirts still required some ironing, and (though we did not realize it at the time) began a trend towards greater use of toxic dyes, finishes, and man-made fibers in our clothing. They were marketed as “no-iron,” “wrinkle-free,” and “easy-care.” This trend has escalated and it can be challenging to find garments today made from non-processed natural fibers. Ease of care was the higher goal and, of course, selling more products.

I also recall having a great interest in vintage clothing, garments worn by my grandmother and aunts. As a teenager and young married woman myself in the late 1970s, I frequented vintage- and thrift-shops, looking for little black cocktail dresses to wear to art openings at the North Carolina Museum of Art, where my husband was the Director of Graphic Design. This was driven by both budget and style considerations. Twenty years later I donated



most of them to Thompson Theatre at NC State University for their costume collection. These clothes were well made; they are still holding up 60-70 years after being sewn.

While I was busy building a career as a marketing and development professional, and being a mother and wife, I continued to make art. I began with what I knew--painting, then migrated to collage and mixed media after a class at the Penland School. It was during my first artist's residency in 2004 at the Vermont Studio Center (VSC), that I began experimenting with the addition of textiles to some of my mixed media pieces. While there, two of the visiting artists, Steve Locke and Alison Saar, were taken with some small works I was making using hosiery and encaustic.

Steve said, "I have never seen anyone do this before, I think you should drop everything else and pursue this!" Alison agreed and perhaps just as importantly they disabused me of my notion that textiles were not really accepted as a proper art material. Steve introduced me to artists like Miriam Shapiro and Judy Chicago, as well as Sheila Hicks and Eva Hesse, I was delighted to learn all I could about how they were using textiles as a feminist expression starting in the 1950s, to honor textile craft traditions from many cultures, heralding strong women and women artists who broke stereotypes, and making textile art as a formalist exploration. In particular, Miriam Shapiro coined a name for her work, *femmage*: (*feminine* + *collage*) a composition of paint, fabric, and other materials with deliberate reference to feminine imagery or icons. Shapiro embraced feminism in the early 1970s, making it the foundation of her work and career. She dedicated herself to redefining the role of women in the arts and elevating the status of pattern, craft and the anonymous handiwork of women around the world in the domestic sphere. When I read Shapiro's *Femmage Manifesto* for the first time a few years ago, I felt like I belonged to the same sisterhood of artists.

My early explorations using hosiery and encaustic at VSC were more about figuring out the potential and limits of the media, exploring all the ways I could think of to manipulate them, deconstruct them, layer, them, burn, weave, knot and stretch them. I devised a system of making multiples and then arranged them into larger graphic, mosaic-like patterns. After some time, I moved beyond just the formal considerations of line, scale, color, and balance to explore feminine, spiritual, and cultural questions.

Three weeks after I left my development job at the Lucy Daniels Center in 2012, (with a plan to freelance half-time and make art half-time) I was diagnosed with an aggressive stage-three breast cancer. I knew that if I survived the treatment required for remission, I wanted to devote my remaining time on the planet to my family, my community, and the life-affirming practice of making art. I entered the UNC-Greensboro (UNC-G) MFA program in the fall of 2015, determined to make good in graduate school on the promises I had made to myself.

Building on my love of textiles, I chose to focus on the world-wide problems and challenges associated with the “fast fashion” epidemic, a relatively new phenomenon in the retail clothing sector. Much like “fast food,” that enjoys a much greater awareness, it implies a problem that is not very good for us. Fast fashion was initiated from the increase in fashion shows and TV fashion programs. New looks from the runway are “knocked off” within days of their debut and sent to factories at lightning speed in order to have them in stores within weeks or even days (as in the case of items from the popular TV show *Project Runway*.)” No longer do we have two-three fashion seasons/year, historically spring/summer, fall/winter, and holiday. Many retailers are putting out new stock on a weekly basis and online sellers are presenting new designers and new lines on a daily basis. This supply chain is dangerously fast and volatile.

Larger retailers are making record profits by taking advantage of the globalization of manufacturing; advances in textile technology; and the ease of proliferation of marketing and

advertising schemes, both traditional and online, constantly enticing consumers to fulfill their desires to purchase the latest trendy, cheaply made garments at ever lower prices.

I was nominally aware of this trend starting in the early 1980s when I was last in graduate school, when garment manufacturing was beginning to be outsourced from U.S. companies to Central and South America. It was in Professor Felicia Dean's Materials and Processes (Soft Sculpture) class that my understanding of the huge impacts of fast fashion was raised to a new level. She assigned a project to us to make a work of art or product design from re-cycled denim in response to what we learned from touring the Vanity Fair Prototyping Offices in Greensboro and watching the documentary film, *The True Cost: Who Pays the Price for our Clothing?* Released in 2015, the film seeks to educate people about key issues in trade and agriculture, the challenges of family-scale farmers, textile and garment workers who are constantly subjected to volatile prices, low wages and poor working conditions due to unfair trade policies and corporate practices. The producers are seeking to make consumers more aware of what and how much they are buying, where they are buying, and how they are disposing of their used clothing. Filmed in 13 countries, we hear the first-hand stories of designers, garment workers, cotton farmers, scientists, fair-trade clothing company owners and economists.

## CHAPTER II

### FAST FASHION FACTS FROM THE DOCUMENTARY *THE TRUE COST*

- 1) Americans throw away on average 80 lbs. of clothing/year. In 2015 this added up to more than 14 million tons of clothing waste in U.S. landfills.
  
- 2) A high percentage of clothing is made from man-made (plastic) fibers and blends. These fabrics will take 1,000 years or more to disintegrate in the landfill, leaching toxic chemicals and greenhouse gasses into the soil.
  
- 3) Textiles are the second most ubiquitous material on the planet, only to oil and gas.
  
- 4) Americans are buying 400% more clothing than we were just 20 years ago, on average 64 new garments/person in 2015.
  
- 5) In 1960, 95% of Americans' clothing was made in the U.S. Today, it is less than 2%. In 2011 worldwide, more than three quarters of clothing was made in low-income, predominantly East Asian countries, by 2.5 billion mostly young women with limited education.
  
- 6) Cotton is grown less and less on family farms. It is increasingly a large factory system. The trend toward using genetically modified seed combined with increasing rates of pesticide application is resulting in a significant rise in cancer, birth defects, and mental illness among

workers and is poisoning the land, making it unsuitable for any other purpose. Life expectancy among farmers has declined by 20 years since the introduction of these seeds.

7) China, the largest clothing manufacturing country in the world, has so many people making clothes, about 1.3 billion, so they are not concerned with purchasing the latest labor-saving or safety devices. In 2005, China reported 717,938 work place accidents and 127,089 deaths.

8) Three out of four of the worst garment factory accidents have taken place since 2011, killing more than 1500 people in Pakistan and Bangladesh from building collapses and fire.

In 2015 the fashion industry experienced record high profits of three trillion dollars.

While it would be easy to think these deaths are isolated cases, they are not. *The New York Times* investigative reports, *Newsweek* articles, the books *Where Am I Wearing*, (read by incoming UNC-G freshmen in 2014), *The High Cost of Cheap*, and many other reputable publications and films have documented the poor working conditions, long hours, low pay, unsafe working and living conditions, lack of clean water and nutritious food, and little or no medical care for workers. In many cases workers are discouraged from developing friendships with anyone on the outside, getting married, or having children. In essence their entire reason for living is to do monotonous piece work for 12-16 hours/day for six to seven days/week.

### CHAPTER III

#### PROCESS AND INFLUENCES

The artistic explorations in my thesis exhibition embody society's mass habit to over-consume and discard clothing with little consideration or understanding of the scale of the human, environmental, and economic problems they are contributing to. The maxim, "out of sight, out of mind," holds truth. I have chosen to work with recycled and reused garments as my primary art material in an effort to recycle and redistribute their beauty, with a critical eye on mass consumption and commercialization, labor abuses, health threats, and the ever-quickenening destruction of our planet.

Many of my earlier attempts at approaching this issue were unsuccessful. I was trying to speak to every issue in one artwork, rather than thinking about each part of the fast fashion industry in a thoughtful way. And, I was not paying enough attention to the formal elements in the work. The pieces were coming across as too preachy and didactic, so I took a step back and reminded myself that simply making art from recycled clothes was in and of itself a legitimate way to call attention to the problem, a type of witness.

The duo of Cuban-born artists, Allain Guerra and Neraldo de la Paz, who call themselves Gurerra de la Paz, have collaborated for many years working with used clothing. They call themselves "contemporary archeologists," referencing and reinterpreting contemporary political conflicts and events. Like me, they are fascinated by the challenge of making art from someone else's "junk." They aim to reinterpret the material in such a way that it adds a spiritual energy. By using these very personal materials, the leftover and discarded, they provide evidence of a culture

of mass consumption, where people and things can be cast aside in favor of some fleeting desire or ambition.

A growing number of artists are using castoff garments as part of their art practice like Shinique Smith, Annette Messenger, Ai Wei Wei, Chakia Booker, and Ann Hamilton, to name just a few. Borrowing from the thoughts of one of the artists whose work I most revere, Columbian Doris Salcedo, who also uses everyday items like used clothing in her work, I believe that art can be a witness or testimonial that is both meaningful and aesthetically pleasing. Doris Salcedo uses whatever materials are necessary to explore complex and challenging subjects with no easy solutions like torture, mass murders of youth by the military and gang violence. If Salcedo can use art to contemplate difficult issues like this, I thought surely I can do the same with the fast fashion industry.

In a 2016 exhibition of her work at the New York Guggenheim Museum she used garments in atypical ways in two pieces. One took the form of a simple gossamer silk three-quarter length coat punctured by hundreds of burnt sewing needles. The shroud like form appears to be almost transparent. Exhibition reviewer, Susan Canning, writing for the October 2016 issue of "Sculpture Magazine," says, "From a distance it seems like a finely woven jacket, but on closer inspection it looks like a 'medieval hair shirt,' temptingly attractive, but certainly lethal if worn. She quotes Salcedo as saying, "The coat, 'Disremembered I,' references her recent research on American mothers whose children have been killed by guns." We are left to wonder if these were children killed accidentally by unsecured guns or those who have lost their lives from gang violence or police brutality, all growing problems in the U.S. In another piece, "Untitled," Salcedo uses men's folded white cotton shirts, plaster, and steel rebar to create a three-dimensional, chart-like installation, a record of men murdered by the military.

Emboldened by Doris Salcedo's ability to leave us suspended between delight and horror, denial and complicity, keeping us ever mindful of the precariousness of existence, I had the courage I needed to begin my artistic explorations of fast fashion again. All the pieces in my thesis have been made from reused or recycled materials including men's, women's and children's classic shirts; blue jeans, and thread (purchased from a local recycled goods shop). All parts of the garments have been used: fabric, thread, labels, and buttons.



## CHAPTER IV

### DESCRIPTION OF ARTWORKS

In Piece Number One, “Familial Threads, Remembrance and Loss,” I reflected on my personal history, growing up in a family of strong women who also had a strong sense of style and independence, in spite of raising large families and having to shoulder a lot of household responsibilities. While this was probably driven by the household budget, it also allowed them to explore their own creativity and make unique garments for themselves and their families. When someone makes clothes for you or you make your own, you tend to value them and take care of them in a way that is different from purchased clothing.

In order to make “Familial Threads,” I experimented for several weeks with direct printing (monotype-like) techniques from recycled garments to fabric and garments to paper. Delighted with the level of detail I could achieve, with every warp and weft thread, every seam and every stray thread distinctively reproduced, for this piece I chose to make multiple prints of a shirt collar and yoke on the same sheet of paper. The seams and gathers formed a shroud like, abstract shape. I printed the image four times in vertical succession, using white ink on black paper, each time lessening the pressure on the press rollers and not re-inking successive prints. For me, the four collars represent my Grandmother Rowland, who made beautiful ball gowns for my mother (at the top), then my mother (who learned how to sew from her), making beautiful dresses, suits and prom dresses for me and my sister. I am represented by the third collar. My love for sewing and textiles has manifested itself in countless ways. I make utilitarian items for my home, clothing for myself and family members, and I also use textiles as an art material, as a craftsperson and artist. I will never lose my desire to make new things from fiber with my hands.

The fourth collar in the progression represents my step-daughter who on many occasions had told me she wanted to learn how to sew. However, after several attempts, she lost her motivation, in part because of the availability of cheap, fashionable clothing that does not require patience or skill to make.

The pale green threads in the artwork become fewer and less connected as they move from the oldest (top) to the youngest (bottom) generation, as sewing in our society becomes nearly a lost art, and the threads that once connected generations disappear.

In the art installation, Piece Number Two: “Sewing in the Shadows: Disposable Garments, Disposable People?” I wanted to pay homage to the millions of (mostly young uneducated women) and men in Eastern Asian countries, who spend most of their waking hours sewing fast fashion clothing. The garments they make are predominantly for Americans and Western Europeans and will be sold at large super stores, alongside other cheaply made consumer items. Many of the sewers were lured from their rural homes with the promise of earning money for their families. According to a September 2016 New York Times front page feature story, most of the sewers work in hot, crowded, unsafe low-tech warehouses. They are given highly repetitive jobs—sewing the same side seams, attaching a collar, putting in buttonholes or ironing with large presses. Workers are paid by the piece. They only earn a few cents for each operation done to a garment. The workers are frequently locked into their workplace and locked into the hostels, small rooms with few amenities, where they stay, except for “out passes” on alternate Sundays.

I chose to use one of the most common clothing forms worn around the world by men, women, and children for this art installation--a collared, long sleeve shirt. Suspended from a 12 foot-long metal rack, 100 shirts are arranged by size from largest to smallest. As a metaphor for the austere existence of these workers, who have little opportunity to enjoy life, and are treated

more like machines than human beings, I removed the portions of fabric that cover and protect the core of the body, particularly the heart. What remains is the skeletal outline of the front placket, collar, sleeve seams and cuffs. These are all the parts of the garment that require sewing, so they are related to the actions being performed by the workers. The line-up of shirts resembles an industrial sewing line for piece work. The shirts, as garments that cover the torso, are a stand-in for the workers, workers who do not have the opportunity to fully realize their potential in life, because they are at the lowest rung in an unethical, global capitalist system.

On the lower end of the clothing rack, the viewer can look straight through the lined-up shirt silhouettes. By placing the smallest sized shirts on the high-end, my hope was for the viewer to think of these shirts going on endlessly. I want viewers to identify with the workers who must feel like there is no end to their monotonous work. At the lower end of the rack, the shirts are stacking up more and more densely, some are beginning to fall off their racks, some have a sleeve or a hem coming undone and falling to the ground, a concrete clue to the short life of these cheap garments—most worn a few times and then tossed in the trash. The fabric panels that I removed from the shirts are mounded up on the floor below, already beginning to look like a pile of rags.

Two views of the installation that offer different insights into the work are the interior space, looking from bottom to top and the exterior space from underneath the shirts, looking from top to bottom. From the bottom, one sees a seemingly endless tunnel of color climbing into the distance. This may be a mirror of how the workers feel when they see the volume of work facing them every morning, seemingly without end. At the same time it is hauntingly beautiful, almost like looking into the light at the end of the tunnel as one approaches death. The exterior view reminds one of a skeletal spine, perhaps a metaphor for the garment workers themselves being the backbone of the fast fashion industry.

This piece has been lighted so that the shirt silhouettes are multiplied three times on the wall behind the rack, mirroring the repetitive garment shapes and reinforcing the fact that many of these garment workers are still working in the shadows, behind locked doors. The October 23, 2016 edition of the “New York Times” magazine included an article about animal agriculture abuses. A quote in the story attributed to the late Dr. Albert Schweitzer, seemed equally fitting for the working conditions where most of our garments are made. He said, “Think occasionally of the suffering of which you spare yourself the sight.”

In Piece Number Three: “Shirtwaist/Waste: Landfill Slice,” I used deconstructed shirts one again as my primary material seeking to comment on some of the environmental problems resulting from fast fashion. An approximately 8’ high, 12’ wide, 5” deep installation is supported against a wall with dowels and the weight of the swirled fabrics. Much like geologists take core samples from a glacier, rock or earth and examine it for evidence of changes in material, chemical composition, weather conditions, and changes over time, I envision scientists taking a core slice out of a landfill. And what do they find?

In this case it is a cascade of shirt parts, collars, sleeves, cuffs, and body panels. Some are compacted due to the weight and pressure of what lies above or beside; others are swirled around from the action of the heavy equipment vehicles that constantly turnover and move the waste around to aerate and make room for more. While a real core sample from the landfill would not reveal such a beautiful or fragrance-free compilation of materials, because textiles are the second most ubiquitous material on earth, the odds are high that the content of a random landfill slice would contain clothing.

This composition grew out of another idea I was working on, when a stack of shirt collars on my studio table caught my eye. I was drawn to the 3-D form created and the rainbow of colors. I began this artwork by making a totem-like shape against the wall, thinking about how shirts

stacked in a store display are designed to catch the eye of casual shoppers. Then once purchased and worn a few times they find their way to a charity or the landfill to be mixed with other people's waste. The shirts quickly fall apart at the seams, because of the cheap thread and minimal structural interfacing used. But that is not where the story ends, at least for a very long time, since most of these items will take a thousand years or more to disintegrate. Their bright dyes will hold up forever if any man-made materials are in the fabric blend, and many are doubly protected by "easy-care" chemical coatings.

The final version of this piece is per its title, less of a reference to the retail setting and instead a reference to the landfill, I decided that the piece had to be larger to better correspond with the gargantuan size of the problem. Therefore, the piece grew and became less tidy and structured, but at the same time retained some of its beauty. I can easily visualize this artwork growing over time and being even more monumental in scope. It could be a wonderful public art installation if the collection of used shirts was taken on by a community of people or a school or a corporation. Participants could share in the collecting and making the work, and hopefully, at the same time, gain a new awareness of fast fashion.

Piece Number Four: "Jeans Topography: Bursting at the Seams," is a 40 x 50" mixed media work made from monotype prints on paper, (process described in Piece No. 1), of deconstructed blue jeans that I layered and sewed back together in a pattern along the seams, resembling a topographic map. I chose to use red thread because it is a common fashion accent color for sewing jeans side seams, yokes, and watch pockets. Much like Piece No. 3, this artwork is a commentary on the exponential build up of fast fashion clothing. If we do not quickly figure out a way to recycle clothing into new fiber and clothing or encourage humans to consume fewer garments that will last longer, at some point clothing might cover our planet.

The great irony of this garment, jeans, originally made by Levi Strauss to withstand the toughest of conditions by miners and cattle wranglers in California in the 1800s, is that we now view jeans as disposables. Some of us are old enough to know that authentic 100% cotton jeans are the workhorse of clothing. They can handle all kinds of abuse and countless washings, only becoming softer and better with age.

Needless to say, like collared long-sleeve shirts, jeans have become a fashion item that is worn the world over. In order to guarantee ever-increasing sales, brands like Wrangler (designed and marketed here in Greensboro, NC) have turned this work-horse clothing into a fashion garment. How? --by making them in a rainbow of colors, a plethora of styles from skin-tight skinny jeans to boot-cuts to bell-bottoms; high-waisted, low-waisted, overalls, and more. Then there are the fabric blends for comfort: rayon, polyester and lycra or spandex). Add to that an array of finishes: stone-washed, bleached, tumbled, acid-dyed, and lasered to make wrinkle marks. Finally abrade them to look old and worn, cut holes in the knees and other places prone to wear, and charge an even higher price! If the consumer is still looking for more jeans they can choose styles embellished with rivets or rhinestones, printed or burn-out surface designs. Large fashion retailers know that all of these add-on treatments to jeans make them less durable and they will go out of style more quickly, so we will throw them away sooner and replace them with new fashion varieties, continuing to raise their profits. The accumulative result to our environment is devastating, an exponentially growing amount of clothing in the landfill with more chemicals and man-made fibers than from nearly any other type of garment.

Piece Number Five: "Jeans Geology: Durable and Disposable?" much like the piece discussed above, is a testimony to the volume of jeans filling our landfills. Rather than being a topographic orientation, this one is more akin to "Landfill Slice," looking at an excavated section of the landfill. With its repetitive undulating shapes and dark, build up of jeans parts, it feels

heavy and foreboding. I created this piece using the monoprint technique discussed earlier in this thesis with one major exception. In order to make this piece without having to seam it together, I began with a large piece of paper 120” long by about 54” wide. I folded it down into 12 sections. I printed two sections at the time, waited for them to dry (1-2 days) and then re-folded the paper and printed 2 more sections, etc. until the whole surface was covered. Next I folded the paper with different adjacent sections and reprinted them, making new layers and patterns of material. In some cases I deliberately matched seam lines and in others I deliberately left gaps. Part of the process was left to chance, since I could not see all the sections at one time. The random patterns and weights in the piece mimic the random way they might be tossed into the landfill with all of our other cheap disposables.

Piece Number Six: 80 lbs. of Dazzle: A Key (in)Vestment or Fleeting Desire?

The final piece in this exhibition, is the one that epitomizes the psychological lure of new clothing—that longing for instant gratification, to reward ourselves for some small achievement or to mitigate some challenge or worry we have, with with an immediate pleasure, and possibly the hope that we will feel better about ourselves when we wear this fashionable item. The key vestment is all about dazzle. Its shiny gold, bronze and silver keys gleam in the light and make a beautiful tinkling sound when the wearer walks in it. On the inside one encounters, a different form of dazzle, a never-ending display of fashion brand names from Arrow to Lacoste to Ralph Lauren to Fruit of the Loom and hundreds more, many designed to make us feel better about ourselves with beckoning names like “Treasures,” “Cut Loose,” Elementz,” or “Collezione.” The vest has another “hidden” quality. It weighs approximately 80 pounds, the weight in clothing that the average American and Western European threw in the trash in 2015. When one attempts to try it on, and if successful tries to walk in it, my hope is they will have a first-hand revelation about how much they are consuming and how much they are trashing. It is easy not to notice this

volume/weight when we are constantly buying and constantly disposing of our clothes. We don't realize just how much we are contributing to the problem of growing textile waste. When one imagines wearing such a fine, dazzling garment, they may not think through all the consequences of how it will perform, how often it can be worn, or how hard it might be to maintain. While this is an extreme example, (How could you possibly sit comfortably in this vest?) many people buy clothing that is ill-fitting and uncomfortable in the name of fashion. Later, when they wear the item again, they are reminded of these problems and are likely to just toss it in the trash.

When I began to explore the fast fashion epidemic, I knew I wanted to include an experiential piece, one where the gallery or museum visitor could actually try it on. This is an unusual experience in the pristine museum space, but one that is happening more often in recent times.

One of my best memories from our summer art history trip, was seeing and wearing one of Mexican artists and designer's gorgeous hand-made ponchos when my class visited the Santa Fe SITE Fair in July 2016. Having the opportunity to see, the work, feel the texture, and walk around in it greatly heightened my experience at the time and my memories of it.

Humans are far more likely to remember something if it engages more of our senses, or as philosopher John Dewey might say, it becomes "an experience." It is my hope that visitors to this exhibition, in addition to wanting to see the vest inside and out, will experience the challenge of trying it on, hearing the musical tinkling of the keys, and most importantly feeling the tug of the weight on their body, even if it is only for a couple of minutes.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

All the pieces in “Fast Fashion Fiasco: The High Cost of Cheap,” are extremely labor intensive and required many repetitive procedures. “Working in the Shadows,” required the amassing 104 re-used shirts from friends and thrift shops and about 50 hours of cutting by hand, in addition to the assembly of the installation. “Landfill Slice,” required amassing about 300 shirts, deconstructing them into four parts, and then arranging them against a wall. The two mono-printed pieces involved making multiple prints, at least 30-40 each, and about 12 hours of sewing. Finally, “80 Lbs. of Dazzle,” was by far the most labor intensive. My process included collecting keys from at least 30 different different sources, many from Facebook friends who brought me little baggies of keys they no longer had a use for. The larger portion came from locksmiths and hardware stores in Raleigh and Greensboro which contributed to the project by giving me their mis-cut keys or charging me a small fee/pound.

At last count the vest contained more than 4,500 keys on the outside and more than 400 brand labels on the inside. Sewing each key to long lengths of elastic by hand took well over 200 hours; similarly, removing the labels from all the garments used in the two installation pieces, gently removing the stitches with a seam ripper, was also a tedious, time-consuming task. Lifting the ever-heavier garment as I sewed the rows of keys on with my sewing machine was back-breaking. Next, I sewed the rows and rows of garment labels onto elastic and attached them to the lining. Finally I hand sewed the lining in place. As I pushed myself through this long process to meet the deadline in time for our MFA thesis exhibition at the Weatherspoon Museum at UNC-Greensboro, I was reminded every day of the long hours farmers, textile and garment workers

and retail sales people must work at their repetitive, low-paying jobs, often with little hope of a better future.

My neck, shoulders, and hands, in particular, are feeling the effects of the repetitive motions. But, unlike these garment workers who have little control over their lives, I can go to sleep at night on my soft bed, knowing that I don't have to wake up and do this all day six or seven days a week and still have to struggle to get my basic needs met or be thousands of miles away from my loved ones. Unlike them, I get to experience the deep joy of making art that comes with a few aches and pains.

My greatest hope in the creation of this thesis body of work is that it will help make even a small dent in the growing fast fashion problem. I hope it will leave viewers motivated to make changes in their clothing consumption, maintenance, and disposal habits. I hope to engage their senses, their minds and their hearts. I realize that the world-wide systemic fast fashion problem is much too big for just a few people to solve. But it cannot be solved if consumers are not aware of the problems and begin to make some changes. If we value our planet, our fellow humans, our children's and grandchildren's futures and our own sense of worth; then we must pledge to make meaningful change in the ways we are each capable of doing and joining with others to bring about a healthier and more sustainable means of clothing ourselves.

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CATALOGUE OF IMAGES



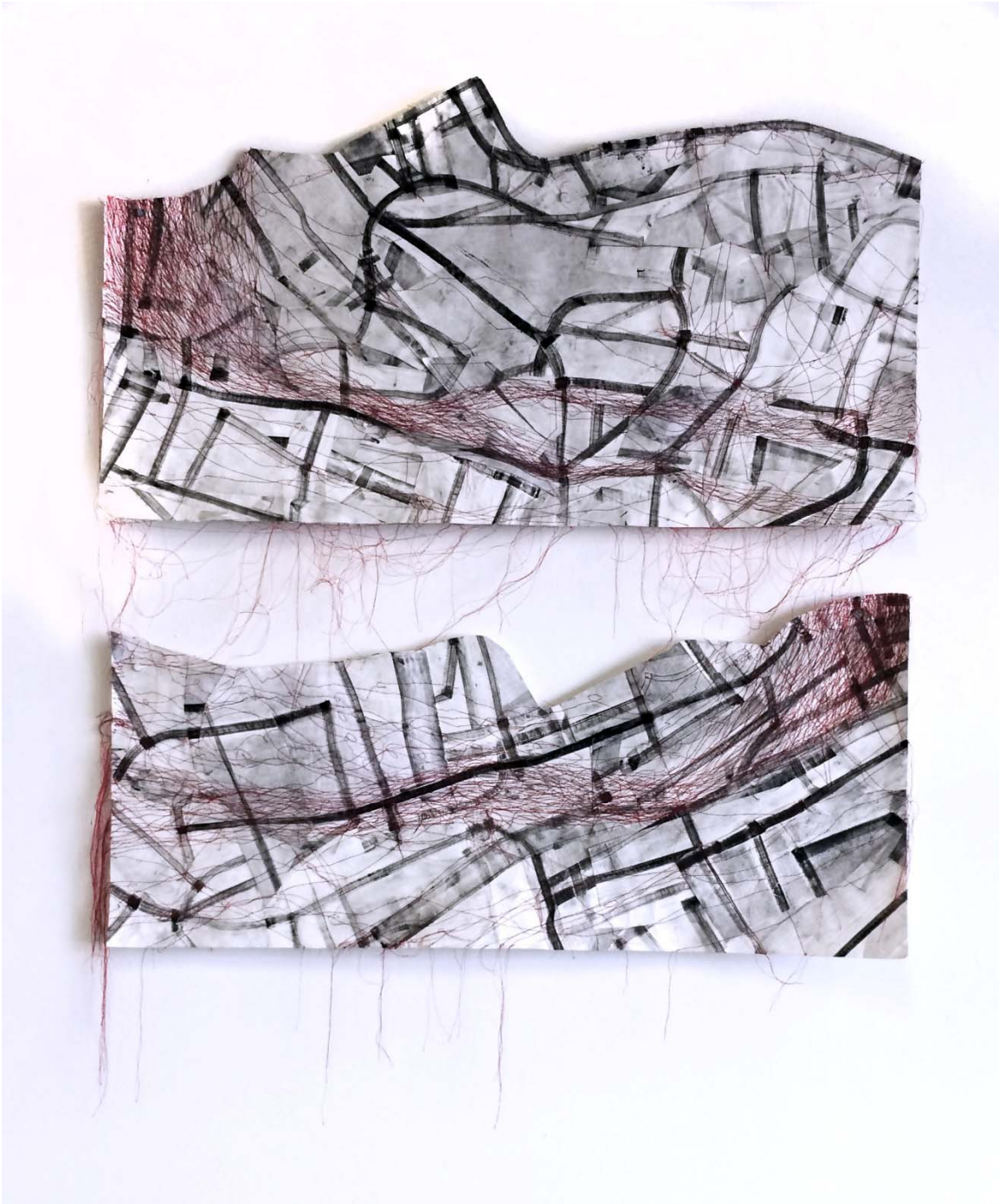
Piece No. 1. Familial Threads: Memory and Loss



Piece No. 2. Still Working in the Shadows: Disposable Garments, Disposable People?  
and two details



Piece No. 3. Shirtwaist/Waste: Landfill Slice and detail



Piece No. 4. Jeans Topography: Bursting at the Seams



Piece No. 5. Jeans Geology: Durable and Disposable?





Piece No. 6. 80 Pounds: Impulse Buy or Key (in)Vestment?  
and two details

