

IrmgardMkhabela, Desma 11

Design PracticeReport

Final submission, August 2013

Introduction

The report is concerned with the parallels and/or commonality of two distinct methods, which are used in the process and practice of fashion and most specifically, as applied to my design projects of past, present and possibly future works.

Further, it outlines the approaches, which have come to define my design methods, (not so much out of choice, but out of habit and experience!). This will look at design practices both in my formal employ in design education as a tutor in design and pattern making, and in informal work for private clients, my M A project, which focused on draping techniques based on Madame Alix Gres' methods, including future projects as a way for artistic expression and development. One's previous work practices with regards to design work and the development of products and production are noted; together with the newly acquired method I have explored to realize the collection for my MA project at the Swedish School of Textiles.

Fundamentally, It looks at the effects of exploring design practices other than one's own, especially draping, both as a way to challenge oneself and as a means to catching up to the state of the arts in design discourse.

Background

The general critique of my work leading to the final project I submitted for the MA program had a lot to do with the state it was presented in, which is 'concluded'. This, I came to learn, meant that the development stages of the process were not exhibited as work was presented always in its 'finished state'. Documenting one's work in design practice, records more than the process but also, one's reflection on the development, the design decisions taken along the way, including ones tribulations, etc., as one experiments and discovers.

Prior to realization of different work practices in design, I had always been accustomed to working in a structured manner, where one had control of the process and possibly, was able to know the outcome beforehand. Typically a design project will start with a few sketches, drawn in pen or pencil where the ideas are explored and then later concluded. A pattern will be made from a technical drawing which is a concluded sketch, usually showing only the back and front of a design and rarely the sides! Sides or a side would be illustrated only when there is an unusual or special detail. The design will be produced from a 2-D pattern and the garment or piece realised will fit as intended and as prescribed from the onset. For most, or rather, for anyone used to working in this manner one would regard this practice as ideal – a system that works and can always be trusted! Perfect as it may sound, the model is far from ideal, at least according to

current thinking in design globally, where there have been great developments in the processes and practise of fashion. Today, design is more than just putting one's ideas onto paper but about practices which encourage developing of concepts in a profound manner, for expressions and results only possible through experimentation. In this way, one is able to create work which is original and can develop and maintain a competitive advantage or artistic prowess by constantly exploring and reflecting on the process. Such work says a lot about the artist, his ideologies and approach to creating, including his processes and techniques during and leading up to the realisation of his art.

The prospect of alternative construction, experimental in this case, is proving an attractive and exciting option from an exploration point of view.

Aim

The aim is to establish one's design practices and to determine the likelihood of switching between work methods as a result of habit, curiosity and manifesto.

Comparisons

Formal employ: Design Education at Tshwane University of Technology – South Africa

The teaching and learning of design, patterns and clothing construction in the majority of design schools in South Africa, including my employer Tshwane University of Technology, is still structured, with certain competences expected in a particular way from every study unit or module offered. The emphasis is, for instance, on doing things 'by the book', for us meaning, following design practices and methods which have been tried and tested and known to work for our school. Again, this is also a way to keep to the traditions and reputation of the school, which include amongst others, excellence in drawing and traditional tailoring techniques. However, our lack of draping skills, has led to the effective use of our different specialisations and strengths to make up for this. Also, experimental work, the least emphasised of our attributes, is abandoned for standardized outputs which tend to be predictable and in some sense, outdated and not in keeping with current trends in design education. The strong move by most design schools in our region to go digital in terms of design and styling of clothing is perhaps one of the responses to the demands of larger manufacturers of clothing and the retail sector in South Africa, who tend to be the largest employers. Knowledge of CAD and CAM are expected by prospective employers in the production and distribution of clothing in the region. Design has always and is taking a strong commercial route, with the emphasis on flat-pattern construction. The disadvantage of working in this manner is that designs realised are 'concluded' from the onset - the use of flat-patterns to create pre-determined designs, limits possible 3-D expressions, which draping offers.

With this in mind, design is utilitarian, at least with most schools; the luxury to explore and reflect on concepts is afforded only in theory and a 'thing' to work towards. Institutions with a niche agenda are very enterprising and tend to compete for the well-resourced learners, in which case, their offerings are far from regular as they seek artistic reverence. As it is currently, the teaching and learning of design, patterns and clothing construction at my employment will

remain pretty much what it is until a workable model is devised and implemented to meet the demand of the changing times.

Following the training I have received in design methods in the M A program at the Swedish School of Textiles, I think I can contribute immensely to the design discourse at my employment and in South Africa at large. With the focus of the program being on improving one's design practices and artistic development, my contribution will be sympathetic to the work methods at my employment, meaning, the synergy of 'things' will be the best option at this stage, since we already have systems in place which 'work'. I aim to inspire and gradually introduce new methods to let student document their processes, which I believe, is a good base for reflection and further study and engagement. Unconventional methods will be demonstrated, so a lot of experimentation will form the main part in the teaching and learning of construction and also as a way to encourage diversity and dynamism. How one shares these experiences with one's colleagues without imposition, will be a lesson in human relations and high regards to the intellectual capital of the establishment.

Private practice: Informal work for clients

In private practice, I find one has the liberty to create and follow one's own design practices, a fact important for those wishing to put their point forward and establish their signature style. If individuality and originality are sought, exploring construction in an experimental manner cannot be over-emphasised; however, one has to comply with the demands of the market, and will have to balance the aesthetics and functionality for the benefit of both parties. In many ways, the process assumes a more practical stance in private practice where the order can be rearranged to suit the situation. Recent projects have presented exciting prospects for working differently and keenness to explore construction unconventionally. Even though one works with some degree of intuitiveness for the element of surprise and different expression, allowing a project to develop organically and 'losing control' of the process, has never been how I do things.

A consignment of a wedding gown recently proved to be a challenge due to the unconventional construction I was aiming at, but had to abandon certain more creative ideas for the sake of the client and time. I was not aiming for radical design but alternate construction, which I am yet to master. So, one is learning that restraint has to be exercised for cost saving and congeniality.

M A Project: "Push/pull...cloth directed" at the Swedish School of Textiles

The graduation project for the M A Program at the Swedish School of Textiles demanded a different approach to constructing clothing and for me, an unusual way of working. The beginning of the project was unlike anything I was used to; sketching for instance, involved draping a piece of cloth on a figure form and capturing everything with a camera so, no pencil and paper were needed! Courses in the program aim at developing and deepening one's artistic abilities and encouraging the 'thinking out of the box'. The emphasis I find is on experimental work; with the process itself being allowed to evolve. Ideas are explored at length. So, exploring further became like an 'unwritten law', leading one to uncharted grounds and different levels of mastery. Serendipity is employed and a 'happy accident' became what one needed during the confused stage of the process, with all the investigation and trying of different expressions with

cloth. Textiles are explored; shape and form were investigated, followed by scale and proportion, including the use of colour, possibly with the use of some surface treatment. Such was the case with this project that the action of the process became the title and central theme of the study undertaken. What I set out to do, which was to explore draping techniques based on Madame Gres' methods, to build shape and form; turned out to be investigation of an act.

'Push/pull...cloth directed', is an interpretation of what Madame Gres would have done to drape lengths of cloth into her famed Grecian inspired evening gowns of the 1930s. So, how a process evolves and becomes is a result of allowing oneself to be lost and letting go, allowing it develop organically. This project is a clear departure from a literal interpretation of her work methods. Draping became the means to realize designs leading to the final collection, a method Madame Gres used and also, a method I have not explored extensively before.

Future Projects and conclusion

With future projects, one can only anticipate better design practices, following exploration of different methods and an intention to work differently. Becoming a better practitioner requires amongst other things that one reflects on methods from time to time, which can be a way to self-criticism and artistic development. The movement back and forth between methods can be a way of bettering and redefining ones design practices.

Sketches

Below are sketches depicting two distinct design practices; with the first one involving producing a pattern from a predetermined design. With this practise, the emphasis has been on the outcome of the product and not much on the process. So, designs are 'perfected' and 'concluded' beforehand, leaving little or no room 'to make them better' or for 'unplanned expressions'.

Depending on how they are drawn, croquis can influence the design and general expression of the design, as is the case with my design practices prior to working differently.

Draping first to produce a design is the practice I have come to learn. Illustrated below, are various exercises which show the benefits of using draping 'to sketch' and constructing in free-form. Reflection is emphasised and the various stages of a design process, which themselves, can be adapted into a method and/or the start of a design.

The method one is used to using, producing designs using flat pattern-making method...



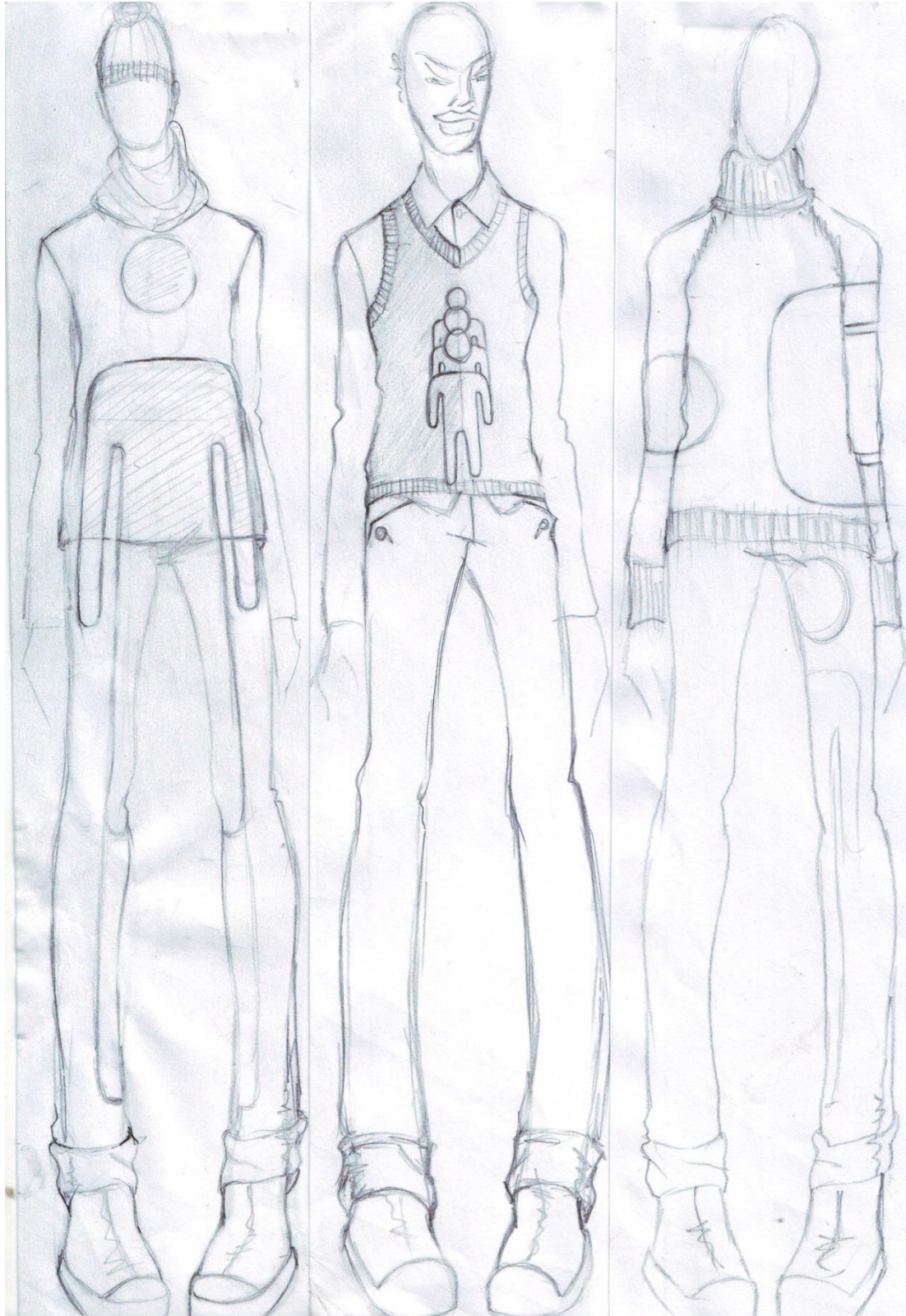
The design is pre-determined – all is in place hence, predictable!



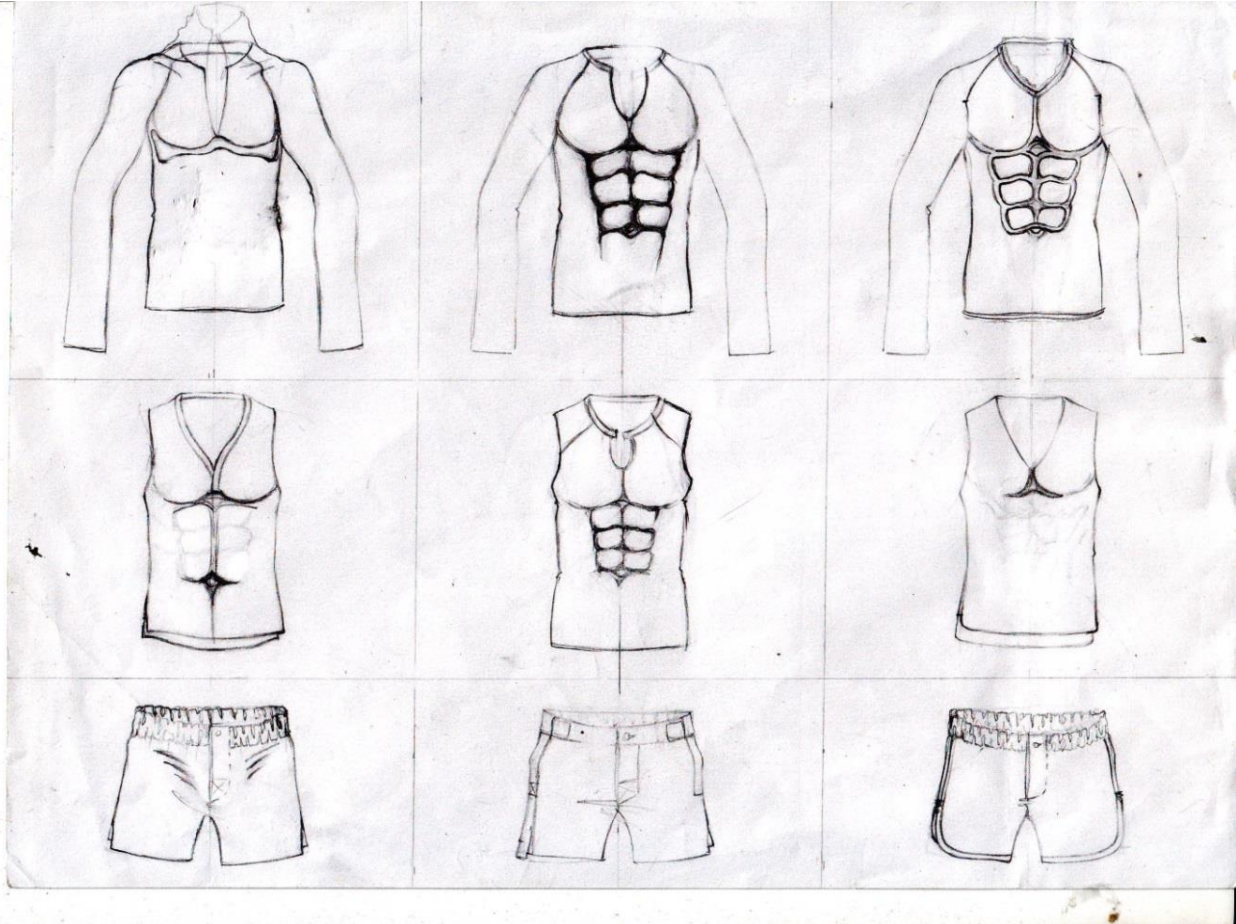
Design expressions influenced by the manner in which the croquis have been drawn



Designs are analysed and a pattern is made from standardised basic-patterns blocks, which focuses more on the front and back of a design/style.

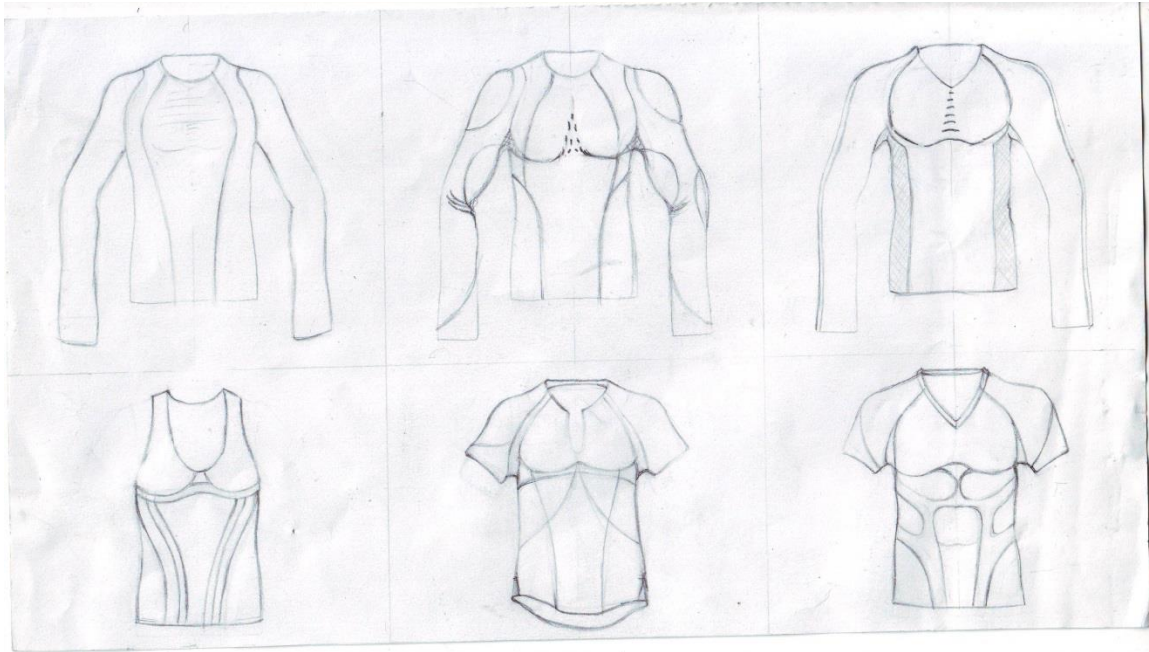


Designs based on a man's torso, a way to remain true to one's manifesto at the time, which was, '*...to reference the body in the process and practice of fashion*'.

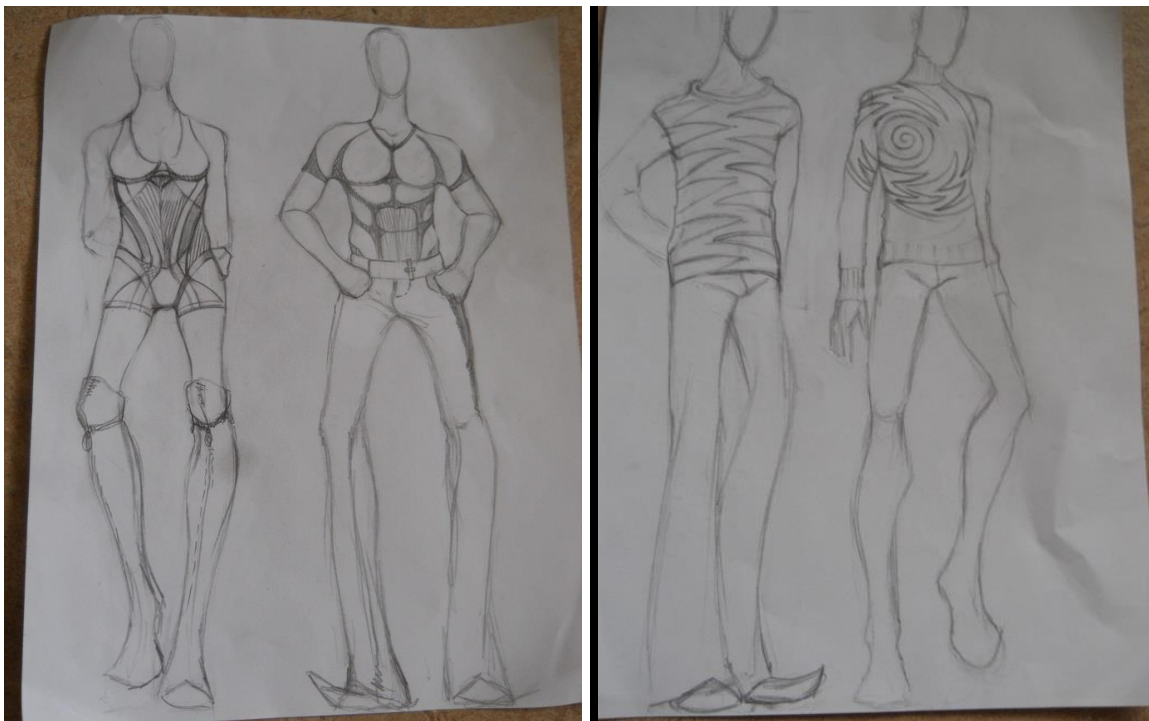


These designs are influenced by the frontal view of a man's body, leaving out possible expressions of the sides and back.

Other sketches



Sketches based on the contours and stance of a figure



Design practice, emphases on reflection and free-form construction

With the consensus that one needs to develop artistically, the following images shows where one started exploring construction in free form into a method one has come to like and use. Not knowing where one was heading, as was the case with draping, I have however found the prospects daunting...



Lifting, folding and twisting is all it took to realise the design. This happened after some hesitation on how to process once the cloth was on the figure form.

Exploration of cutting and then draping

Sketch 1

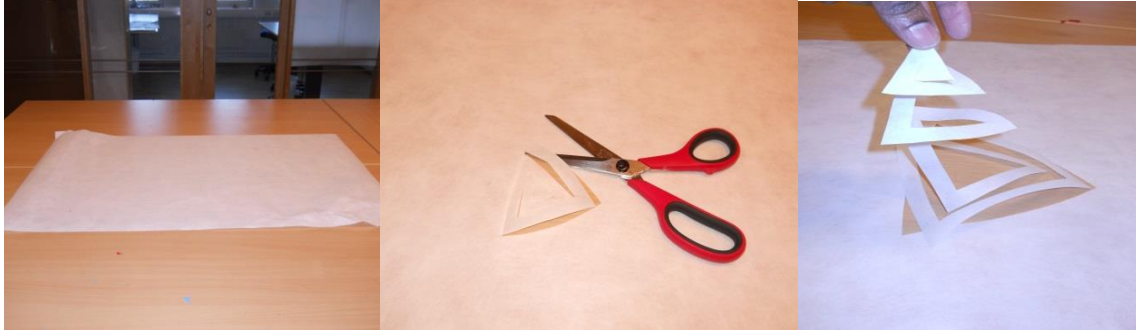


The cutting was contrived initially...



The cut-bits make an interesting effect and contrast when inverted to the opposite side of the cloth.

Sketch 2



A strip is fashioned in a triangular shape out of a non-woven piece of textile, leaving it still part of it.

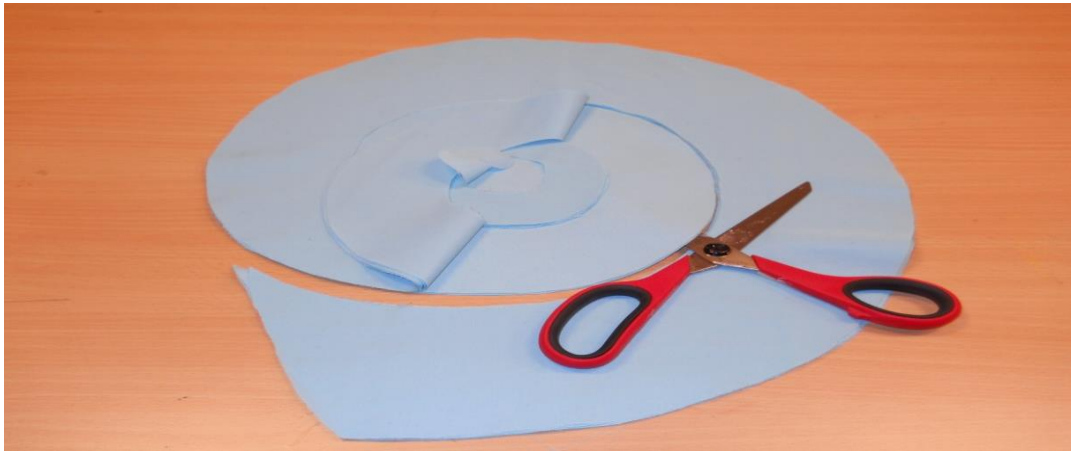


The appropriation of this piece on a figure form creates interesting sculptural effects, both when allowed to hang loose or when it forms a section and even superimposed into a shape.



Sketch 3

Layers of cloth cut into a circular shape, narrowing to a point and forming some spiral strips...



Appropriation of these on a figure form creates a mass of flounces which can be used as part of a neckline, insert, collar or sleeve.

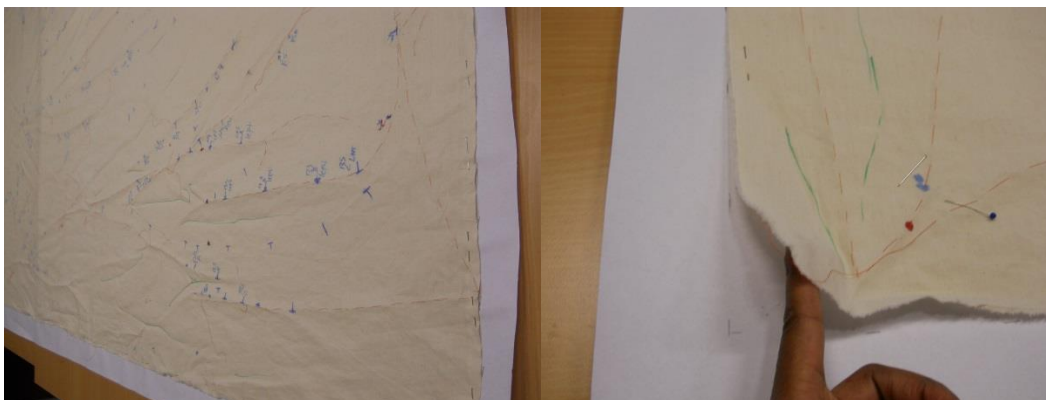


Draping a single piece of cloth without cutting into!

Sketch 1



An almost impossible challenge since no cutting was allowed, so structure had to be built.



Taking the drape design apart...

This has proven beneficial in understanding lines and folds to keep the structure of the design since the design is realised by just appropriating cloth intuitively.

Important Lines and folds are identified and transferred on a pattern, should need arise to reproduce the design.



Exploring different textiles for varied expressions

Sketches to explore shape and form using a varied range of textiles



The 'push/pull' method developed for the MA Program



Overview of free form construction employed for the MA Program

