

# Stories of Wear & Care



**The Lives of Garments and the Stories They Hold**

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The outcomes of a series of garment-led community conversations and photography sessions undertaken as part of RMIT PlaceLab's 'Wear & Care' Research Project.

RMIT PlaceLab acknowledges the people of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung language groups of the Eastern Kulin Nations on whose unceded lands we conduct the business of the University.

RMIT PlaceLab respectfully acknowledges their Ancestors and Elders, past and present, as the original and continuing Makers of Place.

## RMIT PlaceLab Initiative Overview

iii

RMIT PlaceLab is an urban initiative connecting community, shaping place and taking a radically different approach to doing research.

Designed to free research from the campus and bring researchers street-side to connect with local government, industry and community groups, RMIT PlaceLab facilitates site-based research to support the co-creation of new ideas, partnerships, and systems that grow positive impact and opportunity.

Dynamic, actionable and accessible, RMIT PlaceLab research projects are bite-size and community-engaged, generating insights, ideas and solutions that can be implemented together with our government and place-making partners.

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**Long Story Short** — ‘Wear & Care’ is an exploration into methods of fashion “rewilding” in Brunswick, Melbourne. It has gathered locals, retailers, makers, creators, and researchers to learn about and encourage practices that mend, repair and share clothing to build a local response towards a new fashion system.

**What We Explored** — ‘Wear & Care’ considered Brunswick’s future as a creative fashion district by exploring methods of fashion “rewilding” accessible to the community. The changing fashion landscape depends on shifting values and approaches to transform how we produce and consume, to consider new positive ways of experiencing fashion that aligns people and planet. Local fashion “rewilding” supports new cultures in how we better use, make and recreate clothing.

The project included a series of community repair workshops, a research survey on rewilding fashion for the community, a student second-hand clothing redesign display, a research survey for Brunswick-based second-hand clothing retailers, several garment-led group conversations, a community forum in collaboration with RMIT’s School of Fashion & Textiles, and finally a ‘Wear & Care’ exhibition. This book forms part of a collection of outputs and resources emerging out of the ‘Wear & Care’ Research Project, and focuses on telling the special stories that were generously shared as part of the community conversations.

This Research Project has been assessed and approved by the RMIT University College Human Ethics Advisory Network (CHEAN). Ethics Reference Number: 25586.

Research involving human participants is consistent with the guidelines contained in the Australian National statement on ethical conduct in human research and Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.

This book is a collection of 24 garment-led stories gathered across six semi-structured, in-person group conversations with people from our Brunswick, Merri-bek and wider Melbourne community, as part of the ‘Wear & Care’ Research Project. ‘A Garment’s Life: Conversation Series’ was created to cultivate discussions about how we wear and care for our clothing in ways that support a “rewilding” of fashion. “Re-wilding” fashion describes actions that support new cultures in how we better use, make and recreate clothing, and how we experience fashion outside of the commercial industry.

One of our key research aims was to bring together local people to learn about their practices of mending, repairing and sharing clothing that support a community response towards developing a new fashion system. The research had a particular focus on activities embraced in the home or collaboratively in the community. Taking into consideration the changing fashion landscape in Australia and shifting social values in Brunswick, Melbourne, we used garment-led interviews and storytelling to establish a safe and supportive environment in which people could share their lived experiences naturally and honestly.

Our community collaborators were invited to bring along a garment from their wardrobe that had been mended, repaired, or shared, or a special garment with a story behind it. We gathered groups of three to five collaborators, with each person, in turn, presenting their chosen piece and generously sharing the tales it told, allowing each garment to guide the narrative. The clothing textures, tatters, embellishments, stains, markings, and mends were illuminated by stories of loss, change, connection, joy, optimism, and reclamation. Local contemporary artist Jody Haines joined each session to document the clothing through photographs and to create a garment-centred portrait with each of our community collaborators.

Worn, crafted and cherished garments from homes, wardrobes, neighbours, and loved ones were celebrated at the heart of these sessions, with the stories shared catalysing broader conversations. The garment-led method not only allowed for meaningful conversations around daily practices of wearing, repairing, and laundering to emerge, but also encouraged reflections on the deep and complex interconnections between fashion and sustainability, and topics including gender, societal values, language and authorship.

Although we began with an open but simple proposition of what to bring along, the stories themselves expanded to encompass far more than what flaw, spill or general wear and tear may have been mended, or how a garment was shared and with whom. The stories alongside the group conversations revealed intricate weavings of values, influences, motivations, memories, relationships, and practices. The garments formed markers of moments in life, statements of values, tools to signify care and to nurture relationships, and connectors between siblings, grandparents and grandchildren, mothers and daughters.

In this book, alongside the stories, we offer eight themes emerging out of the conversations that speak to both the complexity of our connections to clothes and contemporary understandings of fashion explored deeply in academic fashion discourse far beyond the intent of this book.



A community collaborator presenting their jumper for 'A Garment's Life: Conversation Series' at RMIT PlaceLab Brunswick.



A community collaborator sharing the story of their coat for 'A Garment's Life: Conversation Series' at RMIT PlaceLab Brunswick.

## Emerging Themes

### Family influence of women on making and mending skills

The stories and conversations about the influence of family overwhelmingly featured women. Mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and neighbours played roles in encouraging, or deterring, teaching, and caring through making, mending, or offering skills and advice. Women in the lives of our community collaborators nurtured the learning of Sashiko techniques, taught the art of darning, passed on the skill to sew, and planted the seeds of future creative practice. It is amongst these stories and conversations that we acknowledge the emphasis on women's work and recognise that so much of the weight of driving individual and community action towards more sustainable clothing practices is carried by women, too often in the form of unpaid labour.

### Memories and embedded stories in garments

The strength of memories was held by the pieces embedded with personal stories, both visible and concealed. We saw garments with visible mending, organic markings of use over time and hints of hobbies, craft, and creative practice. We heard stories about significant life events, birthdays, weddings, holidays, graduations, homes sold and faded friendships. These were both recollections attached to the garments and future imaginings of memories yet to be made.

### Valuing and cherishing the garment or object

It was clear in the stories shared that garments and objects can hold value in diverse forms. The garments were cherished for their representation of creative pursuits, their connection to key life moments, the quality of their fabrics and fibres, their fit for purpose, and their prolonged lives in the wearers' wardrobes.

### Valuing the materials and recognising their worth

The stories also revealed values centred around materials and their worth. There was a desire to protect, reuse and restore

materials and textiles. Our community collaborators created garments to make use of leftover fabrics and threads, made “new” garments using worn clothing and repaired pieces in their wardrobes to extend their useful lives.

### The role garments play in influencing moods

Some items in the collection were embraced to generate confidence, to symbolise optimism, to align with the climate, to boost happiness or to assert a particular emotion through clothing.

### Connection to creative or meditative practice

A selection of garments symbolised a deeper connection to creative practice, from Sashiko stitching and tapestry crafting to garment making, pottery and painting. These pieces were either worn while creating or formed the final creation. Connections were also drawn between creativity and meditation, emphasising mending or stitching as meditative practice where the craft delivered calm and comfort.

### Relationships and storytelling through garments passed on

Some garments in the collection formed artefacts, passed between wearers in acts of care, that represent the relationships of our community collaborators with loved ones, friends, and mentors. The pieces told stories of successive garment lives, why they were passed on and the meaning they now hold to their owners and wearers.

### Resourcefulness reflecting values or family influence

A sense of clothing and material resourcefulness was revealed amongst the stories and conversations. Alongside the practice of using leftover materials and worn clothing, there were also intentions to mend and embellish clothing to prolong their use. This not only revealed the values of our community collaborators, but at times also reflected the influence of their parents or grandparents in sustaining behaviours introduced while growing up.

The intent of this book is to celebrate the lives of garments and the stories they hold. It offers a glimpse into the humble practices embedded in the clothes that support a “rewilding” of fashion. In reading this collection, we wish to generate a deeper consideration of your own wear and care practices, captured amongst the garments living in your wardrobe. You might be a wearer, a clothing sharer, a mender, or a garment maker. In whatever way you position yourself in connection to the garments you own, wear, repair, or share, we hope you might find a little of yourself reflected within this book that inspires you to share your own garment stories.

Garment story sharing as part of  
‘A Garment’s Life: Conversation Series’  
at RMIT PlaceLab’s Brunswick  
Research Studio.



02

Lia's  
Coat



18

Nuwan's  
Pants



34

Jingyi's  
Jumpsuit  
& Jacket



46

Joy's  
Shirt



06

Olivia's  
Backpack



22

Clare's  
Socks



36

Michelle's  
Jacket



50

Elena's  
Coats

10

Yuko's  
Jeans



26

Anna's  
Cardigan  
& Bag



40

Paula's  
Jumper



54

Imelda's  
Dress



12

Jodie's  
Dress



30

Eloise's Blanket  
& Baby Garment



44

Utkarsh's  
Jacket



56

Cale's  
Jumper

60

Hannah's Dress



74

Hayley's Jumper



64

Rosie's Baby Singlets



78

Danish's T-Shirt Dress

68

Helen's Jacket



82

Elissa's Jumpsuit



70

Arky's T-Shirt



86

Sanjana's Jacket

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**Women**

Family influence of women on making and mending skills.

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**Memories**

Memories and embedded stories in garments.

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**Value**

Valuing and cherishing the garment or object.

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**Materials**

Valuing the materials and recognising their worth.

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**Mood**

The role garments play in influencing moods.

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**Practice**

Connection to creative or meditative practice.

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**Relationships**

Relationships and storytelling through garments passed on.

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**Resourcefulness**

Resourcefulness reflecting values or family influence.





## Lia's Coat

3

'In the late nineties, Dangerfield had a vintage rack, and I was shopping with a friend who was right into animal print. I wasn't necessarily, but we both headed to this coat. And I put it on, and it fitted me, because she's size 16, and so I bought it. And then about three months later, she told me that she was really annoyed with me, [laughs] because I bought the coat. I said to her, "You can borrow it any time you like." So, she took it and kept it for a year, and gave it back to me. Well, it was completely ripped. The lining, the pockets, the whole lot, but I sew, so I patched it all up and wore it a bit, to the Melbourne Cup and places like that. During COVID, I decided to completely reline it with red lining.

And then I bumped into her. We kinda stopped being friends. She kinda ghosted me. [Laughs] I bumped into her just this year, and she mentioned the coat. It was for the first time ever, she said, "Yeah, you bought it out from underneath me." And I said, "Yeah, I guess I did." And I said, "You can have it if you like." She said, "No, it was always too small." [Laughs] So, that's the coat.

All the buttonholes were ripped, and the buttons had been ripped off. And there were holes where the buttons had been. It was a nasty mess. The pockets were stuffed, like ripped as well, from where she put her hands. So yes, I completely fixed it and relined it. It was during COVID, I put the new lining in. But after she gave it back to me in 2000, I patched the whole thing up by hand. And then during COVID I thought "It needs a new lining." The lining was black. I thought that red would go really well with the gold.

When I originally got it, I just had to redo all the seams. It's quite old. I think I saw it in a movie and it's probably a sixties coat. It's got the neckline. Which I really don't like, the neckline. And I just don't know how to change it. There's a label inside, 'Travel Coats'. It attracts a lot of attention. When I wear it, people kinda look.

#### 4 Lia's Coat

It's for special occasions. I'm kind of sick of it now because you can only have so many wears—when you just wear the one thing to all the special occasions. So, I might start wearing it around during the day. I bought a poodle just when COVID started, and I thought the coat might match the poodle. [Laughs] Which is why I did the lining. It's a black poodle. But when you've got a dog and you're in a dog park, you just end up covered in mud, so that didn't work.

You'll also notice under the buttons that it has been ripped on the outside as well. And then around the pockets, I think that had to all be stitched and a lot of the stitching was coming undone. I've been a seamstress all my life. Then during COVID, I was on social media a lot, and people were going through their wardrobes and asking if they knew anyone who would put up a hem or — So I've got a business now doing alterations. And it's great to hone your skills that way because you get to rip clothes apart and see how they're made, which is really good. It's like being a mechanic. You get to rip the engine apart and then put it back together, and you need skills for alteration. So yes. I enjoy it.

People are always asking me about repairs and alterations. And then they're always asking me to make them clothes as well, but that's so time-consuming. It's much easier—and more challenging I find too—to just repair and try to figure out how to fix it or how to alter something. Which is why this conversation really appealed to me, because I thought, "Oh, this is down my alley."

I had a woman come to me with a coat that was also vintage. It was a massive job. All the cuffs were frayed, and I needed to salvage as much of the original fabric as I could to fix it. This waist coat was a full-length Armani coat that got attacked by moths, and this is what I salvaged. So, I got to rip an Armani apart, which was nice.'





## Olivia's Backpack

'This is my backpack. It's my only backpack, so I take it everywhere. I got it when I was 8, and I'm 22 now. Recently, I've torn off these little pieces, they used to be like rubber, so I tore those off by accident, and all this stuff has happened to it. I was kind of thinking I don't really like it anymore, you know, like it isn't very fashionable. It's not a colour that I love. I was starting to kind of mull over, like "maybe I'm gonna donate this bag one day" or something like that.

But it carries all my stuff everywhere, it's been very faithful. Then my best friend, well, one of my best friends, owns the same bag and I didn't know. I saw it one day, and you know, she had all these beautiful stains all over it, and she was carrying it around so lovingly. I was like, "wow, here are our bags together," you know, serendipitously. And I had this newfound love for my bag. When it broke and I patched it up, I loved it so much more than before it had broken.

The patch itself is from like an art project I did for the City of Melbourne. I had some scraps left over, and I just found these scraps under my bed and patched it up. The thread I got on Facebook Marketplace or Gumtree in like 2012, something like that. Someone was passing on her mum's deceased estate embroidery thread. I was a child, and I snapped it up, and I was like "oh my God, DMC embroidery thread, incredible." This is so old as well, and I used that for it. I just kind of took stock of all these different crafty things that I had had in my life. And I was like, "actually, I love this bag." I'm gonna carry it with me everywhere. I love it so much now. There you go.

The thread was totally fine to use. This lovely lady who had owned it, she like wrapped it around one of those little thread cards, and she had them all colour arranged in a little tacklebox and they were in perfect condition and really cared for and loved. I was so chuffed. So that's my bag.

## 8 Olivia's Backpack

I feel like I pretty much had the approach in the back of my head, just like through little embroidery projects here and there, like learning from my nan. Kind of conceptually I think I knew what to do. And then recently I've been really into books like this, mending books and seeing Sashiko, which I think has really been the in-vogue thing in a lot of craft circles recently. I've seen it really come up a lot. And so, I think that particular style of mending was in the back of my head, so a bit of like both. I didn't google anything to figure it out. I was just like, "oh, needle and thread." A really intuitive process.'



## Yuko's Jeans



'I bought this pair of jeans in Brisbane in an op shop. It was a half price day, and they were only \$3.50. I thought they looked great. I wore them a lot, but they were already old and had started to wear. They were very open where the right pocket is, and I was like, "Oh, I have to mend them." I always wanted to mend but there was nothing to mend. So, I was like "Oh! This is a great opportunity." And so, I did!

I had Sashiko threads, so I did a bit of stitching, and it looked great. And then another hole came, so I was like "Oh! I wanna use something different." I'm a weaver and I dye yarn with indigo and mud, so I thought, "Maybe I can just use that." I did that, and then I wanted to use different techniques, so I did a bit of weaving in the hole where the pocket is. And then, I kept doing that. I did the left bottom one this morning with the yarn that I got from a beautiful indigo dyer in Japan. I used that yarn to make a scarf a few years ago. It's got lots of memories, the yarn itself. It was leftover yarn. And there are still holes, so it's a work in progress.

We all learned Sashiko mending in school. I'm from Japan, and that's something we all had to do. My mum sent me Sashiko threads and material that she got from a ¥100 shop. I was doing that project, but it was getting a bit boring, so I didn't finish it. But I still had the Sashiko threads. My mom is a very crafty creative person as well. I was probably in Junior High School when I started, which is seven to... I can't really remember when.

Probably riding my bike a lot wore out these jeans quicker. I was wearing them regularly and then I noticed another hole or two and I was "Oh. I have to mend it." So, I put them aside and I haven't worn these for, maybe, the last couple of months. But this conversation gave me an opportunity to mend the hole. I thought, "OK, I'm gonna mend the one that I've been putting off," so I did it this morning. I think I'll wear them again. And I like the hand stitching, especially the one I did this morning. I wasn't very careful with tension because I was in a hurry, but I like how it creates the texture: the kind of gathered fabric.'

## Jodie's Dress

13



'The story of this dress. It's a hand-me-down from the early 2000s, from my dance mentor. My background is in dance. The director of a company I worked with, Annetta, always had this amazing wardrobe. I was given this dress when she left, she always used to give me clothing. The dress, I think, was the label, 'I Peck Your Pun'. Two young designers who had a store in Sydney in the early 2000s, late nineties. I also used to try and buy from new young designers. Annetta gave me this dress, so it holds a lot of meaning. I love to wear it.

As you can see, under the armpits, the fabric has faded. I'm a chronic sweater, although a bit less so under the left arm now since I don't have any lymph nodes. But I still sweat profusely from the right. A lot of my clothing has this issue and for years I've been trying to work out how to deal with that, because no one else will want to wear it if I give it away. It's a bit like the oil stain in the garment story that Arky shared today, but human produced. I don't want to get rid of the dress, and I don't like to see clothes that are hanging there and not being worn, so I decided to hand stitch an 'armpit gusset'.

I'm quite into these glittery fabrics a bit too. Plus, it's also connected to the background with Annetta where all our performances were always costumed. I don't have many technical skills when it comes to stitching, everything I do is hand sewn. I tend to try and mimic a machine. I find that hand stitching is very meditative so can go into quite a luscious zone when I'm stitching.

I do a lot of mending and hemming: I used to do all my children's hems by hand. For my daughter that would be quite a few times a year. And when they had performance costumes or book week, I would always make their costumes using hand stitching or deconstruction. I love deconstructing clothes as well.

This dress is not really quite finished, but I don't know whether I will sew something on the other side. I don't really have the

skills to know what's going to happen to the fabric if I cut into it. Knowing whether it will survive a cut. There are such beautiful darts in there with ruching around, so I don't want to mess with it. I'm trying to do something that will just deal with the fading from the sweat in the fabric. Also, this fabric went quite hard and cuts into the skin, so the softness of the silver material works well. I'm a bit of a bower bird, I like glittery things, and fluffy things, but it's got to work with the dress somehow.

With the silver side, I just wrapped it around and then stitched it so that it lined up with the top. Then I cut around after stitching. That's why it's quite close together. My finishes tend to be pretty rough on the back. It's like when we used to do performances: "Don't worry about what's happening in the back." Things would fall apart during a dance, then you'd have to sew it again after. We would get hand sewn into garments all the time before you went onstage. So, I have a really rough technique. I keep thinking, "Oh, I'll get a machine." I know that I would get into using a machine, but really like hand stitching.

My sewing kit is just little bits that I have collected over the years. I have things from when I was probably 7 or 8 from my Holly Hobbie sewing kit. I tend to keep buttons and scraps of material and all that kind of thing. A lot of upholstery stuff. I nearly went upholstery with the dress, but that's a bit rough under the arms. This repair is probably not going to survive the sweat, but that's all right, I can replace it. The silver was from book week or something that the kids did.

I would patch the other side. The reason why I never finished it was because I thought "Oh, do I go symmetrical, or do I cover the sweat?" But the sweat is actually worse on that arm. Which is the arm, in fact, that now doesn't sweat because the lymph nodes are gone. But it would cover the ruching, I think, if I patched it. And that's why I'm always like "I'm only going to stitch here." Then I just put it in the cupboard and only

remembered the dress when I was finding something to bring along today. Although now, having it hanging up there, I am thinking "Do I even do something a bit more?" I could bring the patching down further on that arm and have a different kind of shape and connect with the pattern on the dress.

It's funny. I never would've chosen this dress for myself. My wardrobe suggests I don't really have an identity a lot of the time because I'm wearing so many hand-me-downs. I'm very, very fortunate because I have friends with great taste. [Laughing] But I often feel like, "Do I really have an identity?" Because I'm not choosing myself. Maybe jammies (pyjamas) are what I really like. [Laughter] Or I'm always wearing a little scarf or fabric around my neck. Loose bits of fabric, that's also what I like.

I haven't connected with Annetta for a few years now, since COVID. She's a wonderful individual. She went to live with the Quodoushka in Arizona, and then we lost contact. I wonder if she remembers the dress. She really loved fashion and had so many beautiful pieces. And fashion was a really important part of our performance process. Working with garments and fabrics. All of us who worked with her do have some relationship to fashion, although I wouldn't say I have a very strong relationship, but certainly other people drawn to her work are into costuming.

She was a milliner, but dancer primarily. When she first came to Australia, she made hats and gave that up about 10 years prior to when I started working with her. She collaborated with a silk and textiles maker and printer. We did a lot of performances at art galleries in Sydney because of the design and construction of the costuming. There was always a strong connection between the choreography and what we wore.

## 16 Jodie's Dress

As I moved away from her work and into contemporary dance, I started to use costuming for a while, but the aesthetic changed in contemporary dance in the 2010s. It shifted to an 'everyday' aesthetic. But I always felt like I needed to have a costume. [Laughing] But then we started doing seconds, so that was good. It was like, "Oh, alright, we're gonna do a hue of colour, so everybody go out and try and find a shirt or something comfortable to move in." But then I used to do a little bit of drag and cabaret influenced performance, so we were always costumed.

I guess I think about fashion or clothes, but the way fashion has gone has been very disappointing. Especially, fast fashion. And since developing a practice called 'choreocraftivism', I have become more informed by the slow fashion and repair movements. All the problems that happen in the fashion industry are applicable to other areas of the circular economy that are interesting to me, not just fashion per se. Ultimately, I don't identify myself in any way professionally with fashion, most probably because my best friend is an engineer who did fashion design and is incredible on overlockers and machines. I've always understood this to be the standard. I can barely sew!





## Nuwan's Pants

19



'These are some kind of 'tradie' pants that I bought from Kmart. I was looking for a pair that fit my needs for a long time and I just haven't seen them, these ones that are really good quality cotton and they've got knee pads on them. I got some, and I got two pairs actually, I've got this blue pair that I'm wearing now. So, I really like these pants.

These pants were damaged during a move. I had a whole stack of laundry that had to be done and we just didn't have time to do it, so I stacked all our cleaning products on top. Some cleaning products leaked through; I think it was a fabric softener actually. It dissolved some of the fabric and made like a little bleach mark here.

On the other side, that's where the damage happened. It made this tie dye effect. And I actually wore it without a patch for a long time. And I liked that. But then I added this little patch of felt. I did some really hectic stitching just to keep it kind of organic. Yeah, I like how it came out.

I've had them maybe two years. Maybe a year to two years. I wear them every week. I wore them without the patch for most of the time and people were like, "Oh, what happened to your pants?" "Like, oh, they got bleached by this fabric softener I thought I'd just leave it cause I liked it." I thought about doing it black.

I would like more holes to appear so I can add a bit more. I thought about doing it myself because bleach printing is a thing too. The patch is felt, I think it's synthetic. It's a bit of a scrap I had from a craft thing. Like a little cactus plushy thing. Honestly, that tension is a happy accident resulting from my lack of sewing skill. It's a bit like moss or something. And without the patch, it was kind of like an eclipse or something because my skin is a little darker than the white. So, it looks kind of like an eclipse, but yeah, I like this.

## 20 Nuwan's Pants

There's no technique. I used to do a little bit of sewing when I was a kid. Like sewing little pouches and stuff. But you know I have a sewing machine; I just need to learn how to use it. It's just on my list of things to learn. I mean, we did it at school as well. But my mum is into sewing, and we used to get babysat by a neighbour, who was into sewing, in a big way. So, it just rubbed off on me through that. But I love textiles, I love fabric, and I love the processes. I love the making of it. I love the plants. I love every aspect of it. The geometry of weaving, it's incredible. Yeah, it absolutely blows my mind.

I do have a few scraps of fabrics I like. I've got a project that I'm working on for like a poncho thing. A convertible poncho. So, I'm looking at stuff for that, but mainly I just like going to fabric shops and touching all of the fabric. How good is it? Yeah, that's my angle. I do a bit of like sculpture, 3D printed sculpture. I've been using 3D printed sculptures as like little 3D weaving meshes, so just playing with a bit of that. It's an art practice, I think, yeah. I don't know how you label these things.

I like to combine different mediums. I've done a quick experiment. I'd like to make larger scale stuff. I actually made a 3D print in a different session. I designed it using an open-source programme called Blender. So, it's a toroidal kind of structure and I've just done some weaving over it. I don't know what you call that. I'd like to make a big version of it too and just explore, because there's a lot of interesting geometry in weaving. And it's also a method of encoding mathematical knowledge that can be transmitted in a physical way through tradition. Because a lot of these things, I think they're folk technologies, so, I'm interested in creating the next generation of folk technologies and seeing what comes out of that.'



## Clare's Socks



I first purchased these socks from Humphrey's Law in 2019. I think 2019. Before my trip to Scotland to see my sister. And then at the end of 2019, start of 2020, we had the Black Summer bushfires, and that's when I first put on the houndstooth toe padding, because I was wearing leather boots entirely the whole time, so they just wore through the backs and the toes of my socks. And then I moved to Melbourne, and then COVID happened. [Laughs] And then, they didn't get worn as much, because they're outdoor socks. They didn't need to be. And then, I think the next summer is when I first did the red patching, and I think on one of the sides of the socks, you can see the white patching, which is the most recent. I think it's on the other sock, on the side.

I did that a couple of months ago, I think. But these are my most visibly worn socks. I do try and match the threads when I darn socks, but I thought for this pair, they'd had already had the houndstooth on it, so I just kept going. They've been kicking around for about four years now and I might get another two out of 'em.

My mum, she taught me how to sew and mend and do all that. So, the red and the whites are all weaving, and then I just did a quilted padding on the houndstooth, just because it was a very thick wool. And then I overlocked around the edges of that, so it wouldn't fray too much. They are comfortable in the heel and toe. I don't have to wear Band-Aids when wearing in new boots and stuff, because that's my padding.

I bought a coat recently—it was a vintage mohair one—but it was ripped under the arm. So, I kind of laid it out and had this whole triangle where the fabric was, and I put interfacing down, and then—I think I used the same leftover red thread—I just weaved very slowly this patch into the fabric. And then I relined that, sewed the buttons back on, and now it's put away for winter.

## 24 Clare's Socks

I brought these along because they are probably mostly convenient to carry. [Laughter] But I thought mainly about the history. It was my first trip to Europe by myself—I was with a friend, but I planned it entirely by myself. I bought Hamilton tickets before I bought flights. [Laughs] And then the Black Summer happened, and I had a lot of memories associated with all wool, all cotton, no nylon, no polyester. As a kid, the CFA would come around to your school, and they would talk to you about bushfire safety. That kind of education that I had around clothing and mending, repairing. And they were very expensive socks. I mean, they're 30, 40 bucks, so I was like, "I've gotta make this last." So, the socks I'm wearing right now, they're blue and I have used blue and grey on them. I always wear the heel out first. First things first are the heel and then the toe. I remember my mum bought an old cushion from the op shop, and she ripped it open to wash it, and then she found this old, darned sock that had been used as stuffing.'





## Anna's Cardigan & Bag

27

'I teach in the fashion and textile domain, and the amount of waste our industry generates is extraordinary. We get lots of donations from our industry partners and we have storerooms full of fabrics, samples, and all sorts of interesting things. And sometimes our storerooms are bursting at the seams (pardon the pun), and we need to do a bit of a cleanout. When we get to this point, we distribute fabrics between our students, teachers, re-homed, etc.

This cardigan was never a garment per se. This is made up from fabric header swatches generated by manufacturers. Once the fashion businesses select the required samples for the season the swatches are then discarded. The swatches I have used are exceptional quality mixed fibres. The back and sleeves are made up from fashioned pieces of fabric, which means that it is produced on a knitting machine, but it also takes on part of what the final garment's going to look like, as opposed to being cut out of a piece of fabric. You will notice that the sleeves were destined to be the back panel of a jumper. So that would have been the back of a garment, but luckily, I had two of those, so I turned them into sleeves. It is a bit of a hodgepodge, but it is super comfortable, natural fibres, and it was all destined for landfill. So, I use my creativity and sewing skills and it is extremely satisfying to think that these beautiful, beautiful fabrics do not end up somewhere in a big hole. They take on another life!

This bag actually was made from a very well worn, loved pair of expensive jeans. I had bought them for myself in the nineties while on holidays. Versace jeans. They were brand new. I wore them to death. Then I cannot remember what happened to them, and I thought, "Oh no, I don't want to throw away my Versace jeans." I was a bit obsessed with Versace back then. So, I turned them into a bag. I stitched up the pockets, but I slashed the internals so that the only access to the pockets is

## 28 Anna's Cardigan & Bag

from the inside, making them more practical and secure. So now it is a bag! Denim is perfect to work with as it is so durable. It just lasts forever. So, it is incredibly old. You can tell it is so aged, with sections that have faded over time. But, yes, 25 odd years on and I still use it.

I have assorted colours of denim bags. I have got all these totes that I just grab. And since this was my first one, I have made many out of all my old jeans and I have gifted them to friends and family. I will say to them, "Look, when you've got an old pair of jeans, give them to me and I'll turn them into a bag." And then I gift it back to them and their humble pair of jeans gets an extended life, in another form.

And so that is what I do with my old stuff, give it another purpose and life. And then I saw that Vinnies do these now. They receive so many jean donations that they have had to be creative and re-appropriate them. They also turn them into bags, and they sell them.

So that is my story. And I suppose for me, mending is not a new thing. It is just, my mom was an immigrant seamstress, so I witnessed this in action. I am a first-generation Australian and when I grew up, we did not have a lot. And things just got repaired and we just used them forever. I know we have come full circle, and we think we are being ingenious and innovative fixing and re-appropriating things. We can take inspiration from other cultures that do not create waste and consciously consume. We just need to tap back into that. How clever that was to do that to make things last. It needs to become part of our DNA again.'



## Eloise's Blanket & Baby Garment



'This [baby garment] my grandma made for my brother. She actually made two, apparently. She made a pink one and a blue one, and she had them ready to go when he was born. I'd forgotten about it, but Mum dragged it out before my son was born and I didn't know I was having a boy. It's kind of special because, you know, obviously when my grandma is not here with us. She was a sewer. I'm a sewer, as is my mum. So that's that connection.

The smocking: I have this smocking machine somewhere. I don't know how to use it. But you don't see smocking a lot anymore, especially by hand, and especially in boys' wear. So, I put it on my son on the weekend. It is probably too small for him now, but he looked adorable in it. I think it's cotton. It's got a bit of a pill, so I think it's a blend. I'm not too sure. I don't know how I could be bothered turning out a Peter Pan collar that small.

He was born in 1990, my brother. I do have a few things that she's made for us that we've kept. But I haven't had much of a chance to make stuff for Bruce yet, but he tolerated wearing this the other day. I brought it because it was passed down. I didn't have anything mended. Currently, my house is getting re-furbished, and everything's locked up, or most of my wardrobe anyway. I think it tore mum's heartstrings a little bit seeing Bruce in it on Sunday.

But this quilt is not repaired either. It's made of old band T-shirts that didn't fit, had holes in them, but where I didn't want to throw them out. I didn't know what to do with them. So, I cut them all up and then stuck them all together. I don't know if you know much about quilting — I do not — but sewing a knit into a woven is a pain. I pieced them together, mum quilted it, and then I bound and embroidered it. So, all my 18 to 27-year-old emo phases are documented in a quilt. It's quite large. Yeah, don't make your first quilt this big. There's stuff from when I went to America. There are some that people have

## 32 Eloise's Blanket & Baby Garment

given to me, but I've seen all these bands live. Some of them I would have been quite young. Some of them I got for free when I worked in a music store. They all have a story.

Mum did the ditch stitching, just in the straight panels. I did all the hand sewing. I don't know how long it took I don't remember. I feel like it was pre-COVID, and I just worked on it bit by bit for ages. I knew I was gonna do it, so I collected the T-shirts for years and I would never part with them. I'd move houses and have these T-shirts with like holes in them, and "what am I gonna do with them?"

It's the first and last quilt I've made, and I do use it. I've got a few now. My mum's quilted a few. She's made one for Bruce. So, we've got a few quilts now. The one we get the most use out of at the moment, it's scraps left over from clothes that I've sewed, and she just kept them for years. So, I was like, "oh, there's that dress I made".





## Jingyi's Jumpsuit & Jacket



'This is not a second-hand jumpsuit, but I think I identified it is from Dangerfield, but I bought it half price and when I tried it on — this is the smallest size they have — but even though this is the smallest, it is still too long for me, especially as an Asian. Actually, I found that the whole store, the sizes are a bit large for us. I have asked my friend, and they love the style and like how it looks for their clothing, but it doesn't fit them. So, I changed the buttons: it was actually down to here. And then I changed it so that it finally fits my height. This is a picture of me wearing it [holding photograph]. It's kind of the strongest style of clothing that I have. You can see this [indicating her clothes] is my normal day look, like not a lot of colour and also the pattern, or the shapes, does nothing. Every time I find that it's sunny outside or I want to be a bit happier in my mood, I will wear it, or I want myself to be cute; because normally I'm not a cute person. I don't think I'm cute. After I wear it, it helps me to improve my mood a lot, and also, I wore it for my Masters' exhibition show. So, some big moments, I was wearing it. It actually represents some good memories. And that's the story of it.

For that jacket. This is from the Saturday market. So, it's really cheap. The price was \$10.00, but compared with the quality, it is quite amazing, the price. At that time, I really wanted a short jacket that helped me to be warm in the winter. When I bought it, I found that, regarding the quality, nothing is bad. And so right now it's kind of my go-to jacket every day. Then after I got it, I realised the inside texture is really good. Actually, it looks like a map but I'm not sure, where it is. Yeah, it's a world map. And I guess the clothes are very old, honestly, but I like it. I have had to mend it. Recently the tag just fell off. And then in the back, it's somehow been cut. I don't know where and how, but someone told me and then I realised. Honestly, I don't know how to fix it, so it has been there almost half a year, so not sure when it will be fixed.'

## Michelle's Jacket



I too am the daughter of a seamstress, but I was not allowed to sew as a child or teenager because I was really bad at it, and she was a perfectionist. Mum was forced to leave school at the age of 14 and become a seamstress full-time to help support the family, which meant unresolved fashion design ambitions were never realised until she was much older in her life. She became a specialist in making wedding dresses and professional ballroom dancing costumes. People would bring a photograph and she would combine patterns and stuff.

So, I grew up watching my mum and her sisters and my grandmother sew and every time we had an extended family gathering, sewing would come up on the agenda and there would be fabrics or patterns on the table. But I was not encouraged to participate because I was very bad at it. It wasn't until I got to my twenties that I started to take a bit of an interest. I was living away from home by that point. She wasn't watching over my shoulder, and I started to experiment. I was a secret sewer for about a decade. I never let her know what I was doing. I started playing around with upcycling fabrics into other things, bunting from tea towels and all that sort of thing. But in terms of sewing actual garments, I was really nervous.

Coincidentally, in my 30s years, I met this beautiful friend who remains an inspiration, who introduced me to hand sewing as a meditation. And we worked together around things like Sashiko and a whole lot of different things. Just finding time to hand-sew and to shut the noise out and just watch the stitches emerge on the fabric became a really important part of my practice.

I headed off to art school at the age of 35, having given up on the idea of becoming a mum. I applied to art school as my plan B. I got accepted and found out I was pregnant the next week. I experimented further with fabrics at art school and also began sewing for the baby.

I started to let Mum start to see whispers of what I was doing and eventually decided I had to come clean because this was such a huge part of who I am, and she knew nothing about it. We were close, we knew each other's lives, we were engaged with each other, but I felt like this was a huge part of my secret world that I was gonna let her in on.

This was the first garment that I allowed my mother to see. I didn't make the jacket. I bought the jacket at an op shop for five bucks, and I used my meditation practice to embellish the garment because underneath in here there are stains, and it couldn't be worn as it was. What I wanted to do was just build an identity for me with the jacket. I wanted it to express who I was, and when it was done, I wore it to Mum's house. And of course, the first thing she said to me was, "Oh, where did you get the jacket from? It's fabulous." And I took a deep breath and I said, "Well, actually I got it at the op shop plain and I did all the other stuff on it."

Well, she was absolutely speechless. She asked, "How long have you been sewing?" I said, "A really long time, but I couldn't tell you about it." This jacket opened up a new level in our relationship.

Jump forward another 10 years and I had just finished making my first jacket, from scratch—fully lined! I was so proud of it; I was thrilled with it. Mum was staying with us for the night before she went to hospital. I said, "Look what I've just finished." And she stepped back and she said, "Well, not bad for a kid that couldn't sew bias binding onto an apron for year eight textiles." It was her way of telling me "Good job!"

Mum went to hospital and Mum never came home. There were complications from the surgery, and she died while she was in hospital. But I know that that last exchange we had around my jacket that I made put me on a path to proudly wear



the things that I make, and I can carry the legacy of the makers who were part of my women's family line before me with pride and with identity.

I'm now raising a 16-year-old girl who is so anti-fast fashion. I would say 80 percent of the clothes that our family buy will come from op shops, or they're exchanged through friends. She drags us from Bayside to Brunswick regularly to go shopping together. And we are constantly in a state of cutting things up and remaking them. The fabrics are always her first choice and mine. If the fabric feels right, if it's a natural fibre, if it's something that I want to feel on my body, then we'll find a way to remake the garment so that we can wear it. This year I sewed my first formal dress—a ballgown for my daughter's year 11 formal. She wore it proudly—she loved it, and it was a great moment for us.

When I was a child, we never had the money to go and buy fancy labels, mum made everything. That meant that I had the most homemade jeans at school and hated her for it. She went and got my cousin's Levi's Jeans label off his old jeans and sewed it onto my homemade ones, in a desperate attempt to get my approval for the jeans that she was making for me. But, you know, I was 10. I didn't understand that process. Now I get it. But it's just an evolution and it's just a huge part of who I am now. I wear my clothes with confidence, and I wear my clothes understanding that most of them have had a story before they got to me, but I can just be the next chapter in the story. And it began with this jacket. Thank you.'

## Paula's Jumper



'I normally—I think like many of us—find great pleasure in finding most of my clothes in op shops or through hand-me-downs or having clothes swaps. But once in a while I like to splurge on something a little bit extra. A few years ago, maybe 2018 or so, I started a new job and I thought, "well I'm gonna get some really lovely knits and things to wear in the office." So, this jumper is from Uimi in Thornbury. It's beautiful, beautiful, hyper-local, like 100 percent Australian Merino.

Obviously immediately, like the second winter, it got entirely eaten through by moths. I was just so annoyed. Entirely my own fault. So, this has sort of sat in the cupboard on my repair basket for a number of years. I brought it here [to RMIT PlaceLab Brunswick] recently to the series of mending and repair workshops because I really wanted to do something, like some visible mending. But darning is not my forte. I find it too fiddly. But attending the workshops really gave me the confidence and a few little tips and things. I've gone ahead and done some rather wonky, so don't look too closely, visible mending. I'm actually quite happy now with the layout that the moths have chosen. [Laughter] So I'm pretty thrilled now.

I just like bright colours. I don't know. There's red, orange, yellow and like a creamy white. I just thought they looked good, and so for each of the squares, I think I tried to use at least three of the colours. You can tell where I started off because this is the most wonky and loose. Then I think I worked my way up and it gets slightly less wonky. I did it like over a week, I think, watching TV.

The greatest help was a little trick that I picked up here at the ['Wear & Care'] workshops, which was to not use like one of those shiny darning mushrooms. But to get like a cheapo \$3.00 set, like cork sanding blocks from Bunnings. It was a game changer because obviously the wool would slip on a smooth shiny surface, but the cork has just enough sort of traction on it and it's kind of rectangular. That was so much

## 42 Paula's Jumper

easier to do. I'm absolutely thrilled with how it came out and I'm absolutely thrilled with the sessions that I attended here and the confidence that I got. I got two other Uimi jumpers as well that I'm kind of working on right now. I sort of considered doing pieces of fabric, appliqued, as well, but I finally went, "no, I'm gonna attempt the actual darning."

I've got some jeans that I probably should have worn as well, but I was already wearing these, that I've kind of done like Sashiko. I've tried doing geometric patterns, but I'm not very neat. But I crochet a lot as well. I've sort of thought about doing like little crochet kind of appliques and then maybe felting them on, or something like that, or darning—like sewing them on. I've also thought maybe like making little crochet flowers and doing like little sort of garlands. Some appliques. But, so far, that's only my imagination. [Laughter]

For my mending, I've just picked up stuff along the way. I was quite crafty as a kid. So, it's my very basic sewing skills I picked up as a kid and haven't progressed too much since then. That's about it. But also, Instagram's great for just like looking for ideas. I think I must have probably seen some examples of quite bright colours contrasting and thought "oh, that was cool, I like that".





## Utkarsh's Jacket

'This jacket is my grandfather's jacket. I'm an international student, so coming from my country and carrying these heavy jackets, it's not worth it, I would say. When I arrived here it was wintertime. Same time last year. Winter was here and I didn't have any sort of jacket or something to keep me warm, so he just gave me his jacket. This jacket was with him, I guess, a long time. Maybe more than five years, and he just gave it to me, and I wear it everywhere. I would say everywhere.

Recently, I've been back to the country again, and I also carried it there. I said, "Okay, we can just leave some luggage, but we need to carry this at least." It is quite warm, comfortable, and the best part is that it has a lot of pockets, so I can chuck any number of things in there. And it's kind of water resistant. When there are some showers or something, it keeps me protected from that as well. And one more thing. It's black, so it goes with everything. That's it. That's what I know.

It was without some buttons, so my grandmother put them in. I don't know how, but she did that. Now there's no button over there if you can see. She did something—I don't know what—but it was there once. Now, on this side, part of the button is stuck on the other side. It just came out. That's what I noticed. I don't know very much about the sewing things on this particular piece. I've not mended this thing myself. I wouldn't say a garment, but it's like a tote bag, or just a kind of draw cord thing, that I did myself, but not on this jacket.

My grandfather got a new jacket for himself, and he wasn't wearing this one that often because he's very old, and he's not wearing this heavy jacket these days. He's not going out, so it's of no use to him. It was just hanging in his wardrobe, and he just said, "You can take this one." And I said, "Okay, why not? It's a good piece."

So, that's how it came to be mine, and now I'm carrying it everywhere. It's my home. I've seen him wear it just once or twice. Not often, because he doesn't go out. But it was there with him and that's what I know.'

## Joy's Shirt



'This is an army disposals shirt. I've had this shirt for about 41 years. I did a Bachelor of Education in Art Craft, majoring in textiles at Melbourne State College, which is now part of Melbourne Uni. My major was screen printing, so this was my shirt that I wore when I was in the studio.

Later, when I graduated, I set up my own business making screen printed fabrics, and laminating the fabric, and turning it into umbrellas and matching raincoats and gum boots and things. Then I became like a tiny little factory, and I no longer liked that. But the shirt now carries the memory of all the prints, and I now wear it when I do pottery or any kind of painting or any more messy creative work.

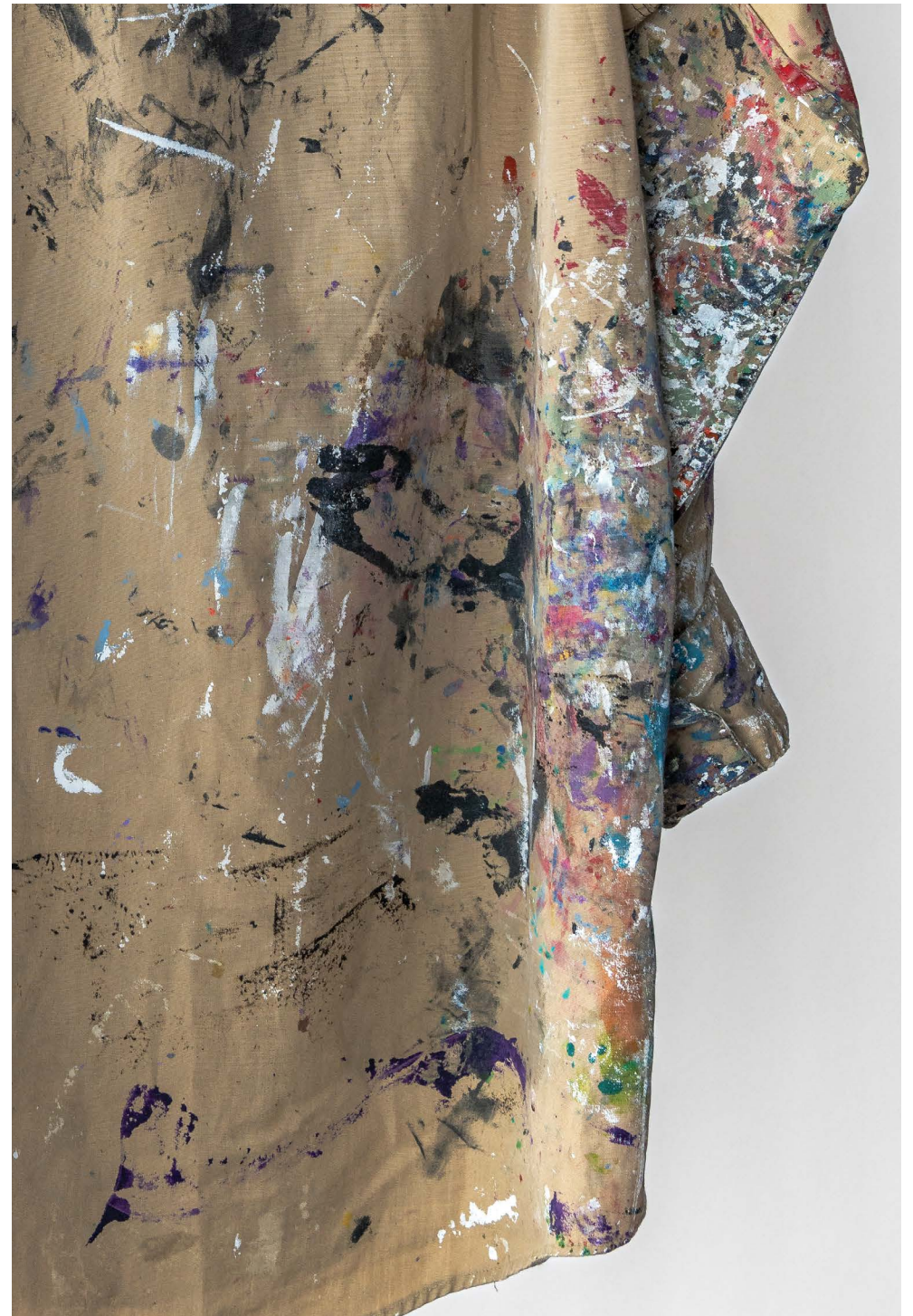
The pocket has been restitched on the right side a couple of times. The under arms have been restitched a couple of times: I notice in not matching cottons. I now notice that the back collar is starting to come undone and is in need of some tender loving care. It's something that I will have for my entire life and will continue to wear when I'm in my happy place, which is being creative or repairing something or doing something. As I said, it usually comes out for messy work.

It carries the marks of my activities. The screen printing inks and things. They're just sort of layered on. I even take a little bit of delight when my hands are dirty of actually sort of rubbing onto it in the hope that it'll make another mark to add to it. Although the marks themselves aren't... I can't say from where or when exactly. I just know that it's 40 years' worth. And how, surprisingly, it all finally becomes grey. Yet I didn't use much grey ink. Lots of things become that.

There was no intention in the thread colours used to mend. None. None whatsoever. It was just, "I need a repair" and "let's get this job done". When you're busy... It was just a case of getting the job done with whatever was in the machine at the time.

## 48 Joy's Shirt

I would never choose to wear a shirt that colour under normal circumstances. I just wouldn't own it. I'd consider it ugly. But the fact that it was big on me, the fact that it was comfortable. No. It's purely functional for me. But its beauty is as a memory keeper and its function. As I said, it'll stay with me until I die.'







## Elena's Coats

'I'm really big on mending. I think this [brown coat] has been with me for 10 years. I don't know the origin of this garment, which country it originated from, so a second-hand shop. I brought it here and I love wearing this. I've worn it many times, but it's just started to come off. Because mending leather is tricky, I tried a few hacks that were on YouTube to fix it and I was able to, and it stayed for a bit, but then it probably needed to be kept in a certain way whereas not folded, and I probably folded it. That's where it started coming off again.

But I love this coat and have not been able to find a similar one. The similar ones are very expensive, because this is pure leather. And it looks really gorgeous; and it's not just me saying this. There were other people telling me, that's what it's like. Oh, I didn't think it suited me that much, but I really like this one. That's a bit of this garment's story. So, a work in progress because it's mended and it's still on and I don't want to lose it.

The worst or the last stage I can think of is to put some iron-on patches on it just to stop it from cracking. I can go in and do a lot of scientific procedures to stop it, but I would like to go around the textile way of working around leather first. Then see what I can do in regard to how they repair composites with fabric, or maybe whatever, and then put resin on. I was like, "Maybe I can try doing it that way because I have a chemistry background." But textile is the first way to go, so that's what I'm trying to figure out these days. How I can fix it and keep it with me.

I do have access to resources to try and do that. I also know how to obtain them as well: not like very dangerous ones. These are basic. You could buy resin off the market and there are leather repair kits as well. But I'm trying to see which one works best, because I've tried once and it didn't work properly, so I wanted to know what I can do with it maybe. The last resort would be iron-on patches and put embroidery around it, but leather is not too good, especially if it's been worn a couple of

## 52 Elena's Coats

times, the leather starts to, you know, go off. It's not very good because it wouldn't hold the stitches very well. Now I need something to stop the crack. That's where this is at.

The other black jacket, this is a fairly new one that I bought in 2021, and I was surprised what happened to the inside seams of both the shoulders: they started to fall off. I've worn this almost every winter all day, whenever I'm at work, because this is the easiest jacket for me to go around in. It has lots of pockets and stuff. But for me something like this, the inseams under the arms have started to come off, so I mended it with the black thread, which was not too bad. I mean, I did a good job, and you can't see it properly now because I've done a good job. You'll be able to see it from the side where it's showing a bit rougher.

It's just somehow unravelling though the stitching. I don't know what's happening and this is 2021 that I bought it. It's not too old. I've worn it a couple of times, but it's my size and this shouldn't have gone off. That also tells us about the current ways of fashion, how the garment has been produced. It's not about the quality. It's just about making stuff, and they are basically like disposable garments. Just wear it sometimes, then just throw it away. But this is not how it should be. Hence, my admirability for this one: I'd like to keep this going. I don't want this to be coming off so soon.'





## Imelda's Dress

'This dress, I can't remember which year I bought it. It was either 2014 or 2013. I was just walking along King Street in Newtown, and there was a pop-up shop. It was a lady who works with women in India in, what she claimed, was a very ethical way. She would do the designs and they would make the clothes. I've always loved fifties style. Maybe because I was born in the fifties, I don't know. When I saw that dress, I tried it on and I thought "wow, I really, really like this." I've worn it every summer since.

I've got a photograph of me in it in a very major part of my life when I separated from my partner. I'm wearing the dress, and I'm pointing to the sold sign on our house. Even though it wasn't a great time in my life, it signifies to me a change in my life, and the change has been very, very significant.

Each year, in the summer when I bring it out, I see another hole. The fabric's really thin now, and if you were to lift up the collar, you would see the colour that the dress was originally, because it's faded so much. I've worn it so much, and I don't want to lose it. This summer I thought that this had had its last day, and then I thought, "no, I can't throw it away." So, it's been repaired.

I think if you hold it up to the light you can see the patches underneath, there's a big one. I've done some of the stitching, and then the bigger patches were done, and I've just learned, I think it's called "boro" patching, when they do these kinds of running stitches. That was up at Second Stitch. Then the other stitches I've done, I just sewed down that front seam, and I kind of put the interior seam and folded it as a backup over the holes.

I did a blanket stitch, and no one ever taught me to sew but I must have watched my mother. I can remember blanket stitch and I really like blanket stitch. I don't know why, and I don't know really what it's used for. But I like it. So, I'm very, very fond of that dress, and I think it's got another summer in it at least. I think eventually, you know, it will just tear so much 'cause it's so thin now. I don't think you can really notice the mending. The intention is to make it blend in.'

## Cale's Jumper



'Mine is a bit of a COVID story as well. So this is not my jumper. It's my partner's jumper. I mended it. But we moved down to Tassie just before the pandemic. We were on the boat, kind of reading the news, going, "This is a bit weird. I wonder if anything's gonna happen." And then a month later, we couldn't leave Tassie. [Laughter] And so, we were down there by ourselves. We moved there because I was going back to uni and I had a scholarship to go down to UTAS. And so we were completely by ourselves. It took us ages to get somewhere to live, because the Tassie rental market is all over the place. And so, it was just the two of us, and it was a long, long winter of just the two of us together, with no friends, nowhere to go, not allowed to go to the pub. Which was fine. It was actually really good. We got really close, but it was a long winter. [Laughter]

I don't normally mend a lot of things really. I make a lot of things. I made my skirt. I make a lot of my clothes, but I don't actually mend that many things. But this is one of his favourite jumpers. I always joke when we go out that we're like those birds that are, like, the female's really drab and the male's always really brightly coloured, because I wear a lot of blacks and neutrals, and he's an ex-club kid who lived around Brunswick, so he's neon and rainbow colours and stuff the whole time — eighties ski jackets.

And so, I had never darned anything before in my life. I definitely didn't get taught it from my mum. I normally just sew with a sewing machine, but I just figured that, obviously, it would be really easy to just do it. And I didn't have a tailor's ham or a mushroom or anything [laughs], so I just free-handed with a ball of — I just got the wool from a charity shop. And there's like a bunch of little bits all over the front as well, and I just completely freehanded it. And it was way more annoying than I thought to do, so — [Laughs]. That bit's really nicely done. That bit's really crappy: it's like really see-through. The varying qualities. But it

took a couple of days, and then I was like, "Okay, done it. Don't rip it again, because I'm not doing that ever again." But I think it does look pretty good. And it is still one of his favourite jumpers, and it's been through the wash a bunch of times since then, so it seems to be holding. That's the story.

Maybe I would try darning with something— I could probably do something smaller again, I reckon, but it was kinda tedious. And it was really ragged. I had to cut a lot of it back to get an edge that I could darn to. It's definitely something from a charity shop that he picked up, like, 15 years ago. Probably in Brunswick. Probably in Brunswick Savers. [Laughs]. I don't know what the brand is. It could be anything. No, it's cut out anyway. I think pretty much all of our clothes are second-hand, or made by me, usually from second-hand fabric. But it's my most visibly mended thing that I've made, that isn't just something that I've made.

This is a blanket I'm wearing that I turned into a skirt, but I tend to buy fabric from Savers or Vinnies or something. Because it's too expensive at Spotlight anyway. And I make quilts as well with second-hand fabric. Occasionally I'll buy a sheet or a big top or something and cut it up to use the fabric. Especially if it's velvet. I love velvet. But, usually, no, I'm not redesigning garments. I'm just creating them from scratch from second-hand stuff.

The purple wool was just from a charity shop. There are really good charity shops in Tassie. So, they're darned. It's just from a ball of wool. I wove them. So, you can see there's a loose weave in there. And then it follows down some of these bits, trying to hold those bits together. It took just a couple of—maybe a week, just doing a little bit in the evenings. I think I just stretched it in my lap and went up and then just went across. And they were all very misshapen, the holes, so some bits would only be a little bit across, and some would be a lot across. I don't think



I'd ever actually seen anything that'd been darned. I just kinda knew in my head that people darned things, so I was like, well. I'm pretty good at fixing pretty much anything, so I thought that I would be able to do that as well. I think that's worked. It's held up pretty well. They're pretty well anchored in there, even if the weave itself is loose.

My partner was often wearing that jumper with the holes when I met him seven years ago. He's very much someone who just wears a lot of bright, raggedy clothes and just layers them and rips them and keeps wearing them. His old favourite pair of pants were a pair of Dejour jeans that are like—there's no button, no zip. They're all held together by safety pins and things. I don't think he'd have the patience for mending. I think he'd be open to the idea of it, but we've all got our strengths. And I think sitting down and doing something methodical and fiddly is very much not his strength. Whereas it is my strength.'



## Hannah's Dress

'This garment goes back away and has had a lot of different lives and stories, but just flagging that this might be a bit triggering for some people with issues around sexual assault particularly.

This garment, originally it was my mother's, and I have tried desperately to find the photo that I know of her — it came with a beautiful lace sort of top that came over the front and was sort of buttoned up—I think she wore it to a wedding as like a bridesmaid's dress or something. When my mother died, I inherited a lot of her clothing, when I was 13 or 14, and I kept a lot of things because she had beautiful clothes and this was one of the things that, especially as a teenager, I loved to wear and wore to death. In fact, there's a cigarette burn on the front. That's something I haven't yet repaired. I think that might have been from that era, and some parts of it are still in need of repair and I'll sort of talk about that in a little bit.

I have kept it with me, but when I wore it to a party as an 18-year-old woman and I left that party one evening, you know, I just wanted to go home. So, I just took the bus and walked home. And on that trip, I was sexually assaulted on the walk home from the bus, and the garment was partially ripped there in the centre.

And for a long time, I didn't do anything about it. I just had the garment because I loved this dress, but it obviously had a lot of associations. At some point I decided, 'no', because it was my mother's as well, and I treasured lots of things from her. So, I worked with a friend and found that little butterfly embroidered patch—again, amongst my mother's things. This was when I was first learning how to do basic sewing. I worked with my friend, and we stitched that piece on together so that I could wear it again.

I was kind of reclaiming that garment from that particular story.

## 62 Hannah's Dress

It's a little bit twee, it's a butterfly, but at the time, you know, this was some years ago. I was young. I've worn the dress since. It's been a regular part of my wardrobe. I'd wear it to work or to parties, it just became again something that I just wore regularly and wasn't attached to that traumatic narrative.

Interestingly, it's at a stage where it needs repair now. It's got some kind of lining. I think it might have had an acetate material. It's sort of around the bodice area and it's just shredded to bits, it has all come off. You'll see it's a mess because it's been worn so much. And I should say that I wore this up in the subtropics for many years, so I don't know if wearing it in the heat has done this. It's a project that I've had sitting in a pile of things I need to learn how to do something about. Because thankfully it's stretchy, I think I'll still fit it, but that lining is something that I'm kind of looking for help with, I suppose. It's a future project, a future mend, I will do.

There's no tag on it so I'm actually wondering if it was custom-made or not, because in the photo that I recall of it, that I could not find for the life of me, there's two of them in matching reds. I will still keep searching for it if I can find it, because it's beautiful, the photo. So, I think it must have been custom-made. I guess it would have been made in the sixties or seventies. It's still quite vibrant, considering.

I think the fabric has some synthetic involved, but I'm not sure. I'd love to get it tested to find out what it is. I often hand wash it, it's pretty robust. Whatever fabric it is, it doesn't crinkle too much, so I've just hand washed it most of its life. Even though it was on regular rotation, I wouldn't wash it every time. Although when I was wearing it in Brisbane, and because I think it's synthetic, it got a bit sweaty.'



## Rosie's Baby Singlets



'I've actually got three little singlets to share. These little singlets I made for my neighbour's baby. Each top is Merino knit, and they were each tops of mine with a different story. This one I'm pretty sure came from Cos, and was just like a nice winter, long sleeve undergarment. This one came from Sister Studios, which is like a Melbourne independent, cool kind of label. And I think that one I bought in 2015 maybe. And this was actually a top that I made for myself out of Merino fabric. They all kind of had a different origin, but I love Merino. Unfortunately, they all got moth holes in them in various spots.

This one was like one of the first tops I'd made myself. So, the stitching was coming away and it was kind of ripping at certain points. But I kind of hung onto them 'cause they're such good material. And then at one point I just went into a cull of my wardrobe, and I was like, "Oh, it's kind of silly hanging onto these tops that I'm not really wearing, 'cause they've got holes all over them." But I managed to find enough space in the centre of each one to cut out a little baby singlet without encountering any of the holes.

Then when my neighbour was having their first baby, I was like this is a nice little thing to pass on. And I knew that they were kind of into sustainability and would kind of appreciate, and not think it's weird, receiving something that's been worn by someone else. That's kind of the story of them. Just today I just knocked on the door and said— "Can I borrow these for the morning?" So, I think he is wearing them.

But after doing that I'm really onto saving Merino now, because I try and use cedar balls and lavender and bay leaves and things, but somehow, they still just get eaten. I've tried darning them, but now baby singlets are just my next solution instead of getting rid of them. I'm just kind of hanging on to things with the plan to do a similar thing. And I started with this one, you can see I was being really careful and hemming the bottom



## 66 Rosie's Baby Singlets

and then I was like, you know what, that's gonna be tucked in anyway. Like, a baby's gonna be wearing a nappy over the top, I don't need to worry about that.

I've also created clothes out of sheets. That's another thing I noticed that you know, everyone got into like the Bed Threads linen that is lovely, but wears you know, if you're washing it and using it in a dryer. I've had a couple of friends give me their Bed Threads linen bedsheets, and you can make so much with linen. It's all soft and you've got this whole sheet to work with. So, I've done that a couple of times. There's not much else I could fit into my own top for myself. I think kids' clothes is good for that. I'm trying to think. Maybe I've turned something into a singlet that was a long-sleeved top.'



## Helen's Jacket



'In the last few years, I've been looking for a job. I'm already doing a part-time job, but for the last 20 years, I wasn't able to do full-time work because I was caring for my youngest child. So, this jacket, the flowers, and the colours represent the positivity that's going towards my job search. The collar it's feminine, it's a good one. The pockets are not real pockets as well.

I think a lot of clothes that are bright make me feel better. If something's the wrong colour, it just doesn't suit me. So, there are a few colours in this that suit my face. I think I look good in green. I was trying on different jackets, and there was one with just, like, a black one with dots and that one was my second choice. And I just chose the one that I just liked straight away. It seemed, like, amazing.

I'm planning to wear it more. I'm even planning maybe when my children get married. It will be my jacket of choice. It has a luxurious feel. I've had it for one year only. Because I didn't like jackets. I've never had a jacket that I've loved for a long time, so it's good to find something eventually. At the same time, I decided that I was going to buy a dress. And I got two dresses, and they're flowery like this jacket, as well, and are very nice to go with it.

I can do hand sewing if I need to mend it. My sons wear pants to school and to work, and all their pants usually rip, and I have to fix them. So, yes, they're my sewing skills; pants and buttons.'

## Arky's T-Shirt



'This T-shirt, I love it. And it's great colours. And my younger sibling has a matching one, so we share that together. But I also really love to cook, and I'm not very good at remembering to put on an apron [laughter]. So, I always get oil spatters all over it. And, you know, that was okay, but I always felt very unclean wearing it, and so I wasn't wearing it. But I love it. I read 'The Art of Mending', and they were talking about these little decorative stitches for patching, and I thought, "I could just use little decorative stitches to add texture to hide the discolouration from the oil." And it worked, and I'm really pleased with it. And now, I wear it again, so I think it was a success.

As a kid, I did a lot of crafts. I went to a Steiner School for primary school, so I was taught all those kinds of skills. But it has been something that I've been revisiting recently because I want to be mending things, but I don't want to be ruining the things that I love. Like, "I love it, so I want to mend it, but maybe I don't have the skills required." So, this felt really good. This was embroidery, which is something that I feel comfortable with, but it was also a way to practice those skills so that in the future, when I want to mend something, I am not learning while also trying to be practical.

I put three different colours in there instead of just the one, because I wanted it to look intentional not just, like, a coverup. I think it'll be really adaptive as well. Like now, more oil, I can cover it, or holes, I can mend them. They were colours that I had. I looked in my collection and picked the right ones. One of them is very close to the colour of the shirt, and then I took one darker and one lighter to add dimension.

I often wear a shirt tucked into my belt, and that very nearly tucks in, or at least the way that it falls on my hips means that it's not seen. But very close friends and family notice. It's started a few conversations. But also, I guess, the people that notice, they know my values already. They see it and they go, "Oh, yes. That's Arky fixing things." [Laughter]

There isn't any backing because there wasn't any hole, so it is just a mess back there. Because it's satin embroidery thread, you can feel it, but it didn't feel like it added heaps of weight. Like, it hasn't changed the drape overly.

My sibling is, I think, a little bit more careful with their clothes, so it hasn't needed mending yet. But I know that for both of us, it would be our most worn T-shirt day-to-day. I would have only a handful of T-shirts that I just cycle through, and they're the same – but this one is constantly coming back to the top. We have a habit of... I will find something that I really love and wear a lot, and then it falls out of use. And then they go, "Oh, you know that jacket you used to have?" Then they have it for a while. And then, like just now, we're starting to get things coming back. Like my wallet at the moment was my dad's wallet. I had it for a few years, and then I gave it to them. And then recently, I said, "Hey, could I have that wallet again?" So that kind of back and forth. And so, I wouldn't be surprised either if something happened to their shirt and they were like, "Would you help me fix it?" And they will send it down or something.

I've got a lot of shirts with little holes that I've done this for. I haven't done it decoratively yet on other shirts. The shirt I'm wearing at the moment, I think, is the next culprit. It has another stain on it. [Laughter] So, I'll do that soon.

But once I learnt this skill, I then used that. Like, one of my handkerchiefs had a big tear down the middle and I put a scrap piece of fabric and did the same kind of crosses all over which aren't coming off. Which I didn't expect because the handkerchief is so worn. I expected adding a piece of fabric to it would really change it, but it didn't which was cool.

I think I originally did want to use that green or that yellow, but I didn't have that colour. But it was also—you know oil stains, the way it's—you're looking at it and you're like, "Is it? Isn't it?" And



this was kinda just to make it... Like, you can no longer tell that the fabric underneath is a different colour because this now grabs your attention.

When you talk about the topography the oil made, those are the shapes that the oil made. When you talk about that, like, I was fearful of wearing my oil-stained shirt because I feel like I'm always struggling with this. I'm like this country hippy in the city, and I don't wanna be in, like, grubby clothes. And trying to figure out whether I should embrace that or really clean myself up for the city. This felt like a good way of not shaming my grubbiness but adapting my grubbiness [laughing] to be beautiful instead of uncomfortable.'



## Hayley's Jumper

75



'This garment has been passed down a couple of times, but originally it was my grandmother's jumper. My mum and grandma have a lot of photos they've taken over the years, so there's a lot of family history documented in those photos. After I talked to mum about this project, she went through them, and sent me a couple of photos of both of them wearing the garment over the years. I have a photo of my grandma wearing this jumper while eating an ice cream in Normanton, in September 1993, while on a holiday. And she always thought it was too big for her, and she actually didn't think it looked very good.

It's my grandma on my mum's side, so it was passed down to my mum and then she passed it down to me. It's a really old photo of mum wearing it, but it was also on a family trip. The jumper looks so long on her. I'm probably a little bit taller than her, but I very likely shrunk this wool jumper. [Laughter] Probably washing it incorrectly, sadly. My grandma was recalling how baggy it was and I was looking at it and thinking, "I have to have shrunk this then, it's so much shorter."

My grandma would hand wash it with a particular brand of wool mix, "Martha Gardner" she said, and she would've used the machine to just spin out the water. She always dried it flat on the clothesline in the shade to keep its shape. My mum said, "Oh, I would've put it in the washing machine on a wool cycle. I wouldn't have hand washed it." [Laughter] But everything else she did matches how my grandma cared for it.

So, my experience wearing this jumper is so different to their experiences. I can also see that there's Velcro on the inside of each shoulder, so it obviously came with shoulder pads, but mum didn't wear it with shoulder pads and grandma likely took them out.

She originally bought it new in early 1993 when she was travelling because she needed a wool jumper but wanted

## 76 Hayley's Jumper

something of good quality. I always thought it was purchased when she and my grandad sold their house and travelled around Australia in their caravan. So, I always just associated this jumper with that. But it was before that time. They'd flown to Tasmania for a trip, and she'd purchased it then. The tag says Tamar, which probably indicates the Tamar Valley region.

It was around June/July 2001 that it was handed over to my mum. My grandma was probably trying to keep her wardrobe minimal and light in the caravan for their trip, and because this wasn't a garment she was very attached to, she was probably happy for my mum to use it on a family trip to New Zealand we were going on. We lived in Cairns, in Far North Queensland, so we didn't really need to have such heavy garments, although she did wear it occasionally in Cairns.

It was sort of continuing this pattern of going somewhere colder and needing a good quality jumper to stay warm, which was repeated when I received it. Mum said that she offered it to me when I was going on a trip to New York during winter in 2014, and she said, "you can take it with you." I looked through my New York photos, but didn't see it, so I don't think I took it. [Laughter] I probably looked at it and thought "pink, that's not really for me." Despite not taking it to New York, I would've eventually said "yes" to keeping it, when I moved to Melbourne. It just became something that I wear at home during Melbourne winters. It is useful, but I've probably held onto it this long because of the shared family connection with this jumper.'



## Danish's T-Shirt Dress

79



'This garment itself, it is truly to my heart because it is the first garment I made here in Australia. Coming here wasn't easy, obviously. I've been sewing ever since I took sewing lessons in primary school. It is not compulsory, but I added it as an elective because I knew I was great at it even back then.

None of my family members know how to sew. So [laughs], I believe it's like a gifted thing—a talent given to me to know how to make a garment. This particular garment is a combination of two different garments. Coming from a humble family, I did not manage to buy fancy clothes, so creating something like this is giving worn clothes another potential of life. Another chance in life. So, it still looks amazing, even though it came from recycled fabrics or materials.

For me, it's a journey because of how I made it here, and am able to create something that I could give back to the environment. And this is the question that I would ask myself in the upcoming 10 years, "What can I give back to the world and into fashion?" This is how I'm going to give back. By creating something that's sustainable and ethical in the fashion world itself.

Most of my products and garments are made out of recycled materials and are upcycled. Back in my home country, I'm pioneering in the creation of recycled fashion. Therefore, I create a lot of fashion out of recycled material, such as paper, aluminium cans, recycled plastics. Even though it is not being worn on a daily basis, fashion can be made into anything. It is subjective; therefore, it can be created into a different kind of form and style. That is what makes fashion beautiful.

This garment itself is made from a T-shirt, but somehow, I created it into a dress—a T-shirt dress—so that it has two different functions. Meaning to say, you could save costs by getting two types of dress: it is adjustable over here where the

## 80 Danish's T-Shirt Dress

gathering can make it longer or shorter so that it can give you a different style in just one piece or garment.

The inspiration behind this is a baseball ball. You can see from the cutting itself, and also at the back it's pretty much the same. I put on a turtleneck collar so that it doesn't go that sporty into the theme, and so you can wear it on a daily basis.

There are three garments pieced together. The cream-coloured T-shirt, the RMIT T-shirt, and another T-shirt from an op shop. Most of them are from op shops. It's great how there are a lot of op shops here and I get to explore more in terms of recycled material. Compared to my home country—it's a developing country—therefore there are [only] a few op shops. It is not as well-known as here, I believe, because of the stigma of wearing new clothes or fast fashion. There's a lot of H&M's and Uniqlo's that have caught on in my home country. They go for this kind of fashion because they keep the sense of keeping in trend. But it's still fast fashion, so it's never a good thing, but H&M nowadays is already going for sustainable materials. It's good for them, even though they are fast fashion.'







## Elissa's Jumpsuit

83

'This is a jumpsuit that I bought, and I don't know where I bought it. I can't remember, 'cause I've had it for years. It's a lovely seventies number and the reason I did settle on sharing this one is because I wore it to my sister's 21st birthday, which was 10 years ago or 10 and a half years ago. I haven't mended it. I haven't done anything to it besides wear it.

I chose it because it's got such a lovely memory associated with it, and I've worn it for other things since, and whenever I wear it, I feel like a million bucks. It's just one of those pieces, but it feels like wearing pyjamas, because of what it is. It's a jersey jumpsuit, but it's one of those pieces that when you come across it in the op shop you just go, "Yes, I don't know why, but I'll take that, and I'll find an occasion."

The only thing I can say about its life before me was that it definitely needed a wash when I brought it home, and whoever had worn it before me had not worn underwear. That was very obvious and a bit gross. [Laughter] That was kinda like, ew. [Laughter] But I got over that. Other than that, I have no idea. There was nothing—it wasn't like it had the little tagging from the drycleaners that it had never been picked up or anything like that on it. It just was there. It didn't have a belt with it, so I've worn a number of different belts and all different shoes. It's got a tag on it, so it wasn't homemade.

I brought a photo of me wearing it alongside my mum, my sister and my daughter at my sister's 21st birthday. That was actually a bar on Smith Street. It's all a bit black, you can't really see much. [Laughter] I didn't really need to try it, all of that beautiful draping, you can kind of go, "it's gonna be amazing."

I wore it to a wedding. I've actually just spent the last nine years living in Germany, came back in December. I wore it to a wedding in Germany, 'cause well when I wore this, I wore it with red patent leather high heels. And to the wedding in Germany,

## 84 Elissa's Jumpsuit

I wore it with pink glitter sneakers. I had a belt; I wear a red patent leather belt as well. Both the shoes and the belt had gold accents, and I had big, gold earrings and gold bangles and kind of had these seventies feel. I think it's nylon all the way. Or polyester. It probably says. Yep, polyester. I think the name of the brand was Bonsoir. My French isn't that great. It does have a little shoulder pad.

There's a 16-year age gap between my sister and myself. So, we have an unusual sister relationship. I mean we're quite good friends now that she's 31. But at that age difference, you know, it's an unusual relationship, and there's somewhere between being a sister and an extra mother. So, her 21st was a special month, and all our families were together. I have lived in Germany twice, and that was during a period of living back in Australia. We'd lived there for three and a half years, come back to Australia for a short time before we went away again. So, her birthday was actually while we were back, but we'd been gone for quite some time before that, so it was nice to all be back and be together as a family.

And that night also, my husband, my daughter, who's in this picture, she cracked it. She really was very unhappy. She saw my husband and I kissing. [Laughter] She thought that was most inappropriate.'



## Sanjana's Jacket



'You know what? My story's actually around COVID too. But where else are you going to get the time to do that? I studied design and majored in textiles in Canberra, and I say that because as you go through, you tend to collect threads from your different projects and none of it gets thrown out. So, after a while, after moving back to Melbourne, I just had, like, a box of different threads to use. And I took this photo just after I came back from Canberra, so I think it's the Yarra Bend. It's of the Melbourne CBD, obviously, at sunset. It was like, the first couple of weeks coming back to Melbourne and I just had this gorgeous sunset.

So, when it came to 2020, I was just working in retail at the time, so you were essentially out of work for a little while and, like overnight, had heaps of time to yourself, so this is one of the projects that I kind of had on hold for a while, but not having enough money. I didn't really have enough money to do the proper weaving tapestry set up, so I went to the Reject Store. I bought a canvas, cut out the canvas, and then found my thickest thread that I had and wrapped it around there, and that's how I got the warp.

So, every day I spent at least half an hour, if not up to eight hours, over three months, constructing this. I'd watch TV shows and I would chat to people whilst doing this tapestry. Which, when I was making it, I actually did upside down, just in case it goes in, and then I sewed the city over the top of that later. The jacket, I just got from the op shop. I knew I needed something red to bring out the colour of the sunset in there, but yeah, it's kinda like a nice way to use up all of my threads and reminisce about it. I can't paint to save myself, so I thought maybe I'll try doing a tapestry.

I wanna say it was probably around 90 hours or so. A fair amount of time went into the back because I knew that obviously wearing it, it's gonna have a lot more—It needs to

be a lot more durable. So, there's a lot of knotting and stuff that happens behind there. And I didn't actually do any testing before doing this tapestry, so I kind of drew out sections of it. I mean, like, I've trained in tapestry, but yeah, as I got to different parts of the cloud, you'll see different techniques and stuff are used on different weeks.

Actually, a really nice thing is whenever I touch certain sections, I almost remember what I was doing at that time. Yeah, I didn't expect that to happen, that like, say there was a movie I didn't like. I used to remember that. [Laughs] Or like, kind of at the bottom where you get the yellow and the orange, that sort of wavy thing. I was having such a lovely conversation just with my cousin for a good couple of hours. Yeah, we'd been together in lockdown chatting a couple of times a week on this, together.

The idea was always there. I mean, it was around the time I saw a lot of people upcycling by doing beautiful paintings and stuff on the back of denim jackets. Like, it would be really cool, but I couldn't. So, I wanted to try something a little different and it was just one of my favourite photos that I had. The sky itself was actually as vivid as that.

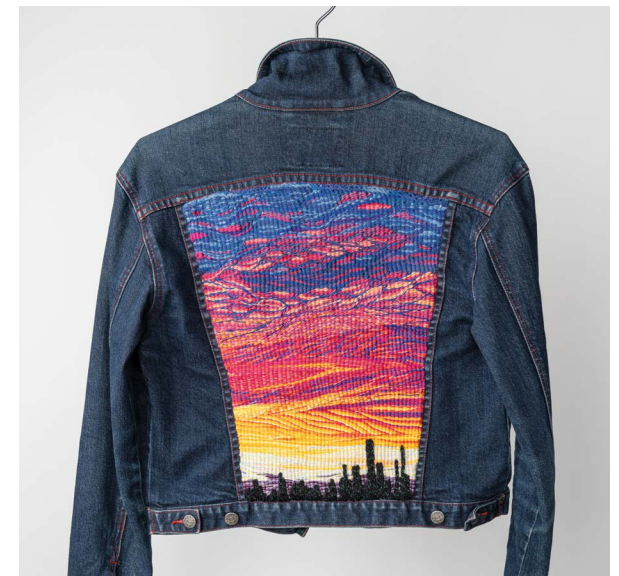
Attaching it to the jacket, that was fun. Obviously, you need to do a little bit of stretching, but the most nerve-wracking bit for anything is when you have to cut it off the frame and it's that thing of, what if it's misshapen? What if, like, I didn't leave enough, so then I don't have enough for knotting? I've got a video of that, where I'm just sitting there being like, "I can't do this." But it's quite satisfying, when you finally take it off, the weight of it. You just don't—I don't know. When it's on the frame, it doesn't feel like anything, but as soon as you have it, it feels like holding a full blanket.

This is probably my third tapestry project. My very first one was a circle. It was a project where we had to do something around the elements. I had air. Has anyone seen Avatar? You know

how they've got the spirals? It was lots of different spirals that come around. And yeah, I think I had another one that's a big, long strip. It was on a top as well.

There is a lot of knots on the back, and I'm very nervous about sitting back on it too, obviously. Because you get the friction. Which you don't think about until you start wearing it, but at the end of the day, these threads were just offcuts. Like, they were otherwise, going to go in the bin as it is anyway. So, I mean, if it gets loved, that's fine. At least it gets a second life. It's never been washed. It gets spot cleaned, 'Febrezed', but it won't go in the washing machine.

It's interesting. I didn't know how much touch would make a difference later on. Like, it's been, what? Almost three years. You can still touch certain pieces and you would forget about it otherwise.'



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To find out more about RMIT PlaceLab and our work, go to:

**[placelab.rmit.edu.au](https://placelab.rmit.edu.au)**  
**@placelabmit**

The outcomes of a series of garment-led community conversations and photography sessions undertaken as part of RMIT PlaceLab's 'Wear & Care' Research Project.



A hyper-local initiative to connect communities, shape place and take a radically different approach to doing research.



PlaceLab is an RMIT University initiative.