

BINOMIA:
AN EXPLORATION OF FASHION AND ART IN THE ARABIAN GULF

by

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Abstract

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This research examined the relationship between fashion and art in the Arabian Gulf and sought to determine if fashion can function as art in the latter geopolitical location. In-depth interviews with study participants revealed attitudes towards the two creative industries that helped create a capsule collection consisting of 5 garments that illustrate the findings of this project and highlight the importance of value differences, regional demographics, and cultural understandings of art. The resulting collection, Binomia, reflects Durkheim's ideas on individuals' ability to read symbols and the difference in opinions that result from these culturally informed understandings.

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Dedication

To my Opa, who provided the example I follow.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Binomia Project

According to Malcom Barnard (2010), “Clothes are bought and worn according to the meaning we believe them to have, or the message we believe them to send” (p. 23), which is an idea suited to all aspects of the fashion industry found across the globe. This research explores the notion of meaning which is created and instilled within garments, specifically in those which are considered by both producers and consumers to be art, challenging the boundaries between the fashion and art worlds. Executed in the Arabian Gulf, it has been formed by utilizing a diverse methodological approach, including qualitative, participatory observation, and creative-based approaches. This project focusing on fashion within the Arabian Gulf is informed by research conducted within the United Arab Emirates, which has been acknowledged by Al-Qasimi (2010), a scholar on Arab and Islamic Studies, as producing a consumer culture similar to those found within the countries of Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and parts of Oman (p.50). However, due to a number of factors including, but not limited to, ease of importing, number of expatriates, and religious influences on government sanctions, both Saudi Arabia and Oman produce certain differences in culture which do not fall within or affect the scope of this study.

This approach is unique in that the subject of study de-emphasizes the notion of conservatism often found within academic studies (e.g., Al-Qasimi, 2010; Al-Mutawa, 2013; Lewis, 2010; O’Cass, Lee, & Siahtiri, 2013) that focus on fashion within the region, which address the subjects of religious expression within clothing, national identity and dress, and Arabic influences despite the multi-cultural demographic. Alternatively, this research project attempts to further broaden academic literature on fashion in the Arabian Gulf by exploring the relationship between fashion and art specific to the region. While recognizing culturally specific

aspects and religious influences on dress, this research aims to include the Middle East in the global fashion conversation by examining the industry utilizing a diverse approach, reflective of both the native population and expatriates who experience local and international influences. While a majority of prior studies, such as Miller's (2007) "Fashion as Art; Is Art Fashion?" (which discusses a variety of scholarly opinions by academics such as Anne Hollander, Edmund Burke, and Noel Carroll) have examined the topic in a Western context, the relationship between fashion and art in the Middle East prior to this project remained virtually unaddressed.

This study uses fashion's ability to incorporate concepts and communicate to viewers to highlight research findings through a creative capsule collection project, which collectively expresses ideas surrounding the relationship between fashion and art within the region, determined by interviews with participants within both industries. In-depth interviews were used to examine the attitudes of producers and consumers towards clothing when it is viewed as an expressive and a valuable component of culture—in other words, as art. This subject was addressed in order to determine whether certain articles of clothing, if viewed as art, would acquire the traditional value system attached to art, thereby altering how garments are worn and determining the length of their lifespan.

Although limited, existing literature and research was reviewed in order to orientate the study by highlighting attitudes towards fashion within the region, even if limited in scope. However, primarily the review was conducted to exemplify one of the central issues to this study, being the aforementioned narrow approach to discussing fashion and the tendency to address only specific aspects that serve to create anything but a holistic overview. Following the literature review, the current state of the art and fashion industries in the region and how art is defined was established through a participatory observation method, from which potential

relations between the two were noted and later used within the qualitative research stage, with the goal of determining if these connexions exist and how exactly they were formed. As well, due to the ever-present and increasing cultural exchange between the West and East, aesthetic values in both a Western as well as a Middle Eastern sociocultural context with observable similarities and differences were noted. Upon establishing this initial base and contextualizing the investigation through both a review of literature and a primary investigation of fashion-art events, the questions fundamental to this research and the resulting creative project were comprehensively explored.

Through qualitative research, the following primary research questions were addressed:

1. Exactly how are garments and dressing viewed by producers and consumers in relation to artistic expression?
2. Do those involved directly in production and consumption of both art and fashion view garments as works of art?
3. What aspects and visual or physical attributes of the garments warrant or disallow their inclusion as such?

Utilizing the results of qualitative data, the study adopted an approach specific to creating both fashion and art within the region. The insight provided by the participants later informed and guided the collection through the concept formation, design process, completion, and photographing.

The final collection was designed with multiple perspectives in mind, formed by collective opinions and displaying notable differences in views. This idea of differences in views, which corresponds significantly to the transient and largely expatriate nature of the region, became the underpinnings of the concept. From the interviews, production techniques,

materials, display methods, and value placement were recognized as some of the factors influencing the categorization of garments, and the collection was created in a way which utilized these themes as guides.

The study employed photography for two critical reasons: (a) to highlight aspects of concept in this project and accompanying paper, and (b) to explore the concept that in order for this creative to be viewed as art, it must not exist within a bubble but rather be viewed publicly, thus availing itself to being a subject of discourse and discussion, as has been accomplished through distributing these images. The highlighted aspect, which explored and expressed these different and sometimes opposing views, was demonstrated through the utilization of multiple light spectrums and projections accomplished with the use of different light sources and filters. Although the photographs display the differences exposed by the application of different light sources and spectrums to the garments, they were utilized for their documenting abilities rather than photography as an art form in and of itself, leaving the individual garments themselves as the works to be observed and critiqued. The need for another medium to be employed in order for these differences to be seen helps to highlight the way in which the nuances of cultural norms and values are only observed and understood by the culture to which they belong, and as such cannot be observed by a culturally naked eye, an idea presented by Durkheim (1895) more than a century ago. Furthermore, photography plays a key role in the way in which major artworks are disseminated, as photographic references are often the initial (and sometimes only) way in which the public interacts with them. Through photography, this aspect of art that has been applied to this collection of garments.

With dialogue on art's inclusion, and with consideration of corresponding ideas around the cultural value placed upon art, how art is consumed and utilized was discussed. Exploration

of whether garment consumption, utilization, and lifespan will be altered to reflect the way which socially recognized art is consumed and used, as well as whether there is a place within the emerging Middle Eastern art and fashion creative industries for the classification of garments as fine art, was accomplished through discussions with those who were interviewed and can be explored further by those who view the creative. To document this process, photos were taken, producing a collection of images that accompany the clothing throughout, from initial sketches to final catalogue. The idea of increased value found within clothing, by approaching clothing as a work of fine art, challenges the fast-fashion model currently employed within the Middle East (Al-Mutawa, 2013), and it is hoped that further exploration of this subject will raise the awareness of slow fashion movements, more conscious consumption, and a sustainable fashion industry.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Arabian Gulf, Fashion, and Values

Spanning the subjects of fashion and art, and how they are manifested and disseminated within the Arabian Gulf, demands rigorous review of three categories of literature, all of which do not directly address the research questions but assist in creating the base upon which this research is formed. The first category, being fashion literature focused on the larger Middle East, includes four subcategories: (a) modest dress, (b) luxury consumption habits, (c) advertising, and (d) communication through dress. Although this research aims to explore fashion in the region from an approach different than the commonly employed modest dress paradigm, its presence within the region is an undeniable fact and renders it a subject to be reviewed.

After establishing the nature of existing academic studies on dress in the region, the second category explores the relationship found between art and fashion within the Western world, which serves as a point of reference and comparison in this research, as no known research on the connections found between the two exist within the literature on Middle Eastern fashion or art. This category has within it three subcategories: (a) discussions on the historical existence of fashion and art relations, (b) the intentions of the maker, and (c) the idea of aesthetics found within both fashion and art practices.

The final category of literature relates to the findings of this research, the creative project which resulted, and the suggested further research on the subject, as all centre on meaning found within objects and value systems built upon these meanings. This section outlines some of the major ideas on symbolic value in objects, semiotics, and identity creation through objects. By addressing these three areas, the existing gap found within research on fashion and art in the

Middle East will be illuminated, and the fundamental principle for this exploratory research can be established.

Fashion in the Middle East

Modest dress. Although the investigation of Middle Eastern traditional attire is not the focus of the present research, the practice of conservative dress must be acknowledged and considered throughout the exploration, as it is still an influence on the manifestation of dress practices within the Arabian Gulf. Modest and conservative dress has been examined extensively as a phenomena existing within the Middle East and beyond, a practice which is the product of religious adherence, cultural normative pressures, and personal choice. Specific to the region, studies conducted by Lewis (2010), Wilson (2013), and Al-Qasimi (2010) approach modest and conservative dress in its relation to Islam, levels of religiosity, and resulting misconceptions and stereotyping by onlookers. Addressing how religion influences dress, with sections specifically addressing Islamic culture, Lewis (2010) demonstrates how the act of dressing modestly is done so in a way which is related to a deep understanding of the wearer's religion. Similarly nodding towards religion as an influencer, Wilson cites Foucault's assertion that clothing is "more generally regulated" (p. 162) by a social institution, in this case Islam, and that the normalizing of conservative dress within the region is due to "a new and stricter form of religion" (p. 162), a form of dress which is an indicator of not only a measurable degree of female dignity, but also of belonging to an Islamic nation. Crediting a negotiation between religious adherence and national identity, Al-Qasimi presents the abaya, a modest garment worn within the Arabian Gulf as a way of dress that, through modifications, expresses personal creativity while still abstracting the shape of the body. Hassan (2010) notes that through an identifiably modest way of dressing, be it the traditional abaya or hijab often seen worn by Muslim women, stereotyping and

misinterpretations occur, aiding in the creation of “an environment of Islamaphobia” (p. 7), increasing the gap between Middle Eastern and Western cultural understanding. While thoroughly examining the social phenomena of conservative dress, these studies fall short in presenting a holistic overview of the interactions Muslims have with the fashion industry, a point addressed by Al-Mutawa (2013), which leads into the subject of consumption within the Middle East. In addition to this, while representing a segment of the population of the region, those who are either non-practicing or non-Muslims are not included within the dialogue, which produces only a partial overview.

Luxury consumption habits. The nature of luxury consumption in the Arabian Gulf is effectively outlined by Al-Mutawa’s (2013) research on identity formation through status consumption in Kuwait, the area responsible for the majority of high-end garment consumption within the Middle East. Luxurious clothes are worn under modest garments, such as abayas, within specific family or single-gender functions and are modified in a way which is favourable to the religious and social requirements of dress (Al-Mutawa, 2013). Al-Mutawa (2013) emphasizes that it is through the consumption of international luxury brands that identities are created and communicated, producing visual indicators of intangible qualities such as levels of religiosity, social status, and reputation. Hume’s (2006) article on dressmaker Peter Loughlin, co-owner of the Dubai based atelier Arushi, demonstrates the cultural practice of single-sex gatherings by noting that the dressmaker rarely views his female clients in his designs. According to O’Cass et al. (2013), increased adherence to religion results in lower consumption rates, demonstrated through their study in Iran. However, Al-Mutawa has revealed an inverse relationship between religiosity and status consumption. Exploration of the relation between religiosity and consumption in Iran indicates that purchasers follow the Islamic prohibition on

“flamboyant display of wealth and superiority” (O’Cass et al., 2013, p. 445), reflected in their attitudes towards luxury goods. When compared, the different ways in which this is interpreted and adhered to in countries in the Arab Gulf renders the study only relevant in an Iranian context, as luxury imports within the Gulf total over \$150 billion annually (Al-Mutawa, 2013, p. 237).

Advertising. Advertising and consumerism within the Middle East is a practice which cannot be standardized across the Islamic world, as suggested by Al-Mossawi and Rice (2002). Further reinforcing the differences Al-Mutawa (2013) and O’Cass et al. (2013) found between Persian and Arabian Gulf consumption habits, Al-Mossawi and Rice note that cultural factors such as communication style, honesty of communication, appreciation of the divinity of the human race, justice and fairness, and the role of women all impact the way in which advertisements are received and responded to. Roberts (2010) notes the difficulties experienced by advertisers working within the Muslim world in positioning themselves correctly, with varying levels of religiosity, specific adherence practices, and cultural differences. This relates strongly to this research in that it demonstrates the culturally specific reading of instruments of communication, applying not only to pictorial advertisements but also to communicative objects.

Communication through dress. In their discussion of the communicative capacity of clothing within the region, Ingham and Lindisfarne-Tapper (1997) explore the “metaphorical languages of clothing and adornment and the natural languages from which theses metaphors are fashioned” (p. 2), and its ability to mark gender-differences, regional variances, and social class. They argue that rather than examining fashion within the Middle East from a functional approach, clothing should be studied for its communicative abilities in order to better understand the regional variation in dress, seeming impractical styles, and gender-specific practices. The use of clothing as a political tool, especially for its ability to create distance and a sense of othering,

is extensively explored by Oliver (2010) in a reflection upon the invasion of Afghanistan. She argues it allows onlooker to legitimize actions through recognizing and interpreting dress styles such as modest dress as suppressive, advocating liberation along with invasion. Oliver suggests that “the force of the rhetoric of freedom, democracy, and security relies on women’s sexual difference and sexuality defined in terms of wardrobe to construct a free, democratic, and secure West against an enslaved, theocratic, and infirmed Islamic Middle East” (p. 130), placing women in a position that feminist scholars view as central to democratizing and civilizing invasion missions.

These arguments, while providing a comprehensive overview of fashion’s interaction with religion, consumption, and advertising as a form of communication, leave much room for further exploration of the field. As noted by many of the aforementioned scholars, the Arabian Gulf is comprised of people from diverse cultures and mixed demographic profiles with specific values and ideals, which manifest as unique buying practices and usages of fashion as an identity-creating and communicative tool. As art is undeniably a culturally produced entity, subjects such as the relationship between fashion and art avail themselves for study in the Arabian Gulf. As a subject with a considerable amount of research that has been examined within the Western world, existing literature on the relationship between fashion and art provides three recognized subcategories, creating a point from which studies on the subject within the Middle East can commence. These subcategories of literature are (a) a historical contextualization of the relationship between fashion and art, (b) the intention of the maker, and (c) the idea of aesthetics. The latter subcategories provide a base from which questions can form, which later will serve as a point for cross-cultural comparison.

Subcategories of Literature

Historical relations. Providing a historical contextualization, Morelli (2014) identifies the split between the art and craft, the latter category being that which fashion often finds itself placed within. She argues that the movement from collective makers to individual artists, and a transferring of credit from commissioner to the individual artist, elevated specific types of making to a higher status, perpetuated by the adoption of Renaissance Humanism and the valuing of individual creativity over collective production. Citing Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects* as partially responsible for identifying specific trades that would later comprise what is thought of as works of art, she notes that while painters, sculptors, and architects enjoyed an increased level of freedom within their work, other traditions which chose to adhere to the guild traditions were reduced to "craft" practices, fashion being one such practice.

Although shifts and changes occurred later within the guild tradition-based craft practices, of which fashion is a strong example, the divide had already been established. Echoing this, Miller (2007) discusses Kant's work on the "Anthropological Remarks on Taste" and his ideas on the so-called art world, which Miller positions and discusses as an entity whose sole purpose is to determine which works may have the title of *art* placed upon them. It is from this recognition of the regulatory nature of the art world that Carroll (1999) asks if all art must emerge from a "pre-existing network of social relations" (p. 239) or if art can exist outside of the institution. Danto (1998) proposes the idea that "it is the theory that takes it up into the world of art" (p. 41) when discussing works such as Duchamp's *Fountain*, elevating an object which is just that—an object—to the status of art through the theory surrounding it.

Intent of the maker. Carroll (1999), while initially questioning the authority of the gatekeepers of the art world, later focuses on the maker, presenting Levinson's argument that in order for a work to be classified as art, it requires a certain intent on the part of the maker.

Acknowledging that this intent is not always found, Carroll suggests that it is perhaps the historical narrative that allows and disallows the title of art, resulting from an understanding and awareness of previous works with such a title. Crane (2013) notes the presence of the postmodern movement in both fashion and art, and cites Wilson's observation of the presence of parody within the industry; one of the attributes of a "postmodern outlook" (pp. 125-126) suggesting that fashion follows a similar historical narrative as art. Boodro (1990) similarly states that "the inspiration and motivations of both artists and clothing designers can be strikingly similar" (p. 124), and proposes that "with fashion and art both becoming more pervasive elements of contemporary life, it is inevitable that they will continue to cross over each other's boundaries" (p. 127).

Aesthetics. However, Kim (1998) looks beyond the intent of the makers and historical narrative, and discusses the theory of fashion criticism as a sphere of aesthetic inquiry through aesthetic criticism, which is defined by Feldman (1973) as "informed and organized talk about art" (p. 50). If dress is a form of visual art, as suggested by Hollander (1993), with "the visible self as a medium" (p. 311), it thus is open to commentary and dialogue, both informed and organized. This idea of aesthetic legitimization of clothing within the art world is echoed later by Miller (2007), stating that when the functionality of clothing is stripped away, "we can equally regard them as beautiful objects of aesthetic contemplation" (p. 39). Aesthetic theory does not exist free of objection, as according to Negrin (1999) it is both inescapable and impossible with a universal set of norms failing to fit all works, and rather should exist "independent of all philosophical presuppositions" (p. 254). If "beauty is not a quality in objects but a psychological response triggered by interacting with them" (Hume, 2006 p. 34), then perhaps it is not the qualities that make up a work, and how it operates within an aesthetic theoretical framework, but

instead how the viewer or wearer interacts with and responds to it, allowing fashion access into the course of discussion.

Value and Meaning in Objects

The idea of interacting with objects, belonging to the art or fashion worlds, or otherwise, brings forth the final literary subject review, research and writing on meaning in objects and the value these objects carry. Davis (1994) speaks to the communicative abilities of clothing through the codes they carry, an idea supported by Wattanasuwan (2005): as “we have a choice, we will consume things that hold particular symbolic meaning” (p. 179). Baudrillard (1996), in his early writing, recognized four ways in which objects obtain value, and apart from function and exchange value, how objects also gain worth through their symbolic and sign value. Symbol and sign value in objects relates to a similar approach taken by McCracken (1990), who suggests that goods “carry and communicate cultural meaning” (p. 71) and that this meaning is in constant movement from several points within the social world. However this approach, when applied to fashion, isolates it, presenting fashion as exclusively part of the consumer goods market. Positioning fashion also as an object of beauty for contemplation, taking Hume’s (2006) approach as to avoid the problems attached to an aesthetic theoretical gaze rather than solely a consumer good, creates further points from which this meaning can flow.

However, with both art and fashion, the reality of the consumer market in which they both partake, though sometimes to different degrees, brings forth the question of value in how items are consumed. Wattanasuwan (2005) notes that this consumption plays part in the self-creation process, relating back to the notion of identity creation through status consumption, as presented by Al-Mutawa (2013), which not only creates but socially locates. Bill Brown’s (2001) Thing Theory acknowledges the assertion of things, recognizing their power and presence, and

when coupled with the thoughts of Leo Stein, being that “things are what we encounter, ideas are what we project” (as cited in Brown, p. 5), the unavoidable presence of things as a value-carrying communicative tool is illuminated, and with fashion it is the things we wear that project the ideas which society recognizes them to carry. The relationship between the viewer of a symbol, the wearer of a symbol, and the creator of a symbol form an association crucial to Durkheim’s (1895) reasoning that the importance of a symbol does not lie in the symbol itself, but in the understating of the function of a symbol and the ability of the viewer to recognize and understand the function. It is in this that the importance of studying the relationship between clothing and art within the Middle East specifically can be found, as all cultures are unique in their understanding of symbols and projected meanings.

Through the discussed literature, the significance of approaching fashion in way which is not rooted in notions of conservatism avails fashion for discussion on its inclusion or disassociation with the fine arts world—a research topic which has been clearly presented as not being addressed in the existing literature on fashion within the Middle East. It is through including fashion in discussions on aesthetics that it can be analyzed as an artistic expression, carrying with it symbols and signs not associated with the corporality of a human wearer but rather on its own merit. Based on the discussed literature and theories on fashion’s connection to art in a Western context, inquiries into how this relationship operates within the Middle East can be formed, aiding in gathering the necessary information through qualitative analysis to produce a creative project which accurately represents regional thoughts on the subject. How the collection will be received will bring forth specific notions on value within objects particular to the location of study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The Process

The variety of research methods used within this study reflect the diversity found within the research questions, which address the issue of art and fashion, culture and meaning, and value within objects. This research consists of three stages, involving two different but equally important research methods and, resulting from this research, a design process. In the first stage, observation methods were utilized. Through attending Art Week 2014 in Dubai, which included Art Dubai, Design Days Dubai, Sikka, and other independent showings, an understanding of the contemporary art scene within the region was gained. This proved important as many galleries, artists, and designers were presented and became known to this research, contacts which later became vital to the second stage inquiry. Apart from becoming familiar with the art industry, this opportunity availed the researcher to view, in only a few locations within Dubai, the artworks both present in Dubai and being exported to Dubai from the international market. This allowed observation of the frequency of fashion-related elements within displayed artworks and any emergences of a pre-established relationship between fashion and art as presented within the Arabian Gulf.

The presence of fashion-related elements were determined through observing individual works. A catalogue of Art Dubai, as well as programs and literature from other events, were collected as references. Field notes were used to identify specific works, artists, and notable galleries. Some features which were determined as evidence of an interaction between fashion and fine art were the use of textiles within the art, stitching and sewing techniques incorporated into the work, a focus on garments and dress pictorially, or the direct use of a garment either as the art work or as an element of the artwork. All of the listed elements were found to be present at the showings during Art Week, both from local and international artists. Legitimacy was given

to the events through their exclusivity and grandeur, with Art Dubai in particular presenting a platform which attracted a high level of participation both locally and internationally. Participant observation proved to be a successful method as it not only served as a way of becoming familiar with the art and fashion scene within the region, later helping in identify participants to interview, but also allowed for intimate viewings of the art works, something which proved crucial because of the artworks' detail. This intimate viewing allowed for textile mediums and techniques to be recognized.

Secondly, qualitative research built from and around the first contextualizing stage involved semi-structured, in-depth interviews about fashion, art, and their connection. The first stage contributed to the second by guiding the interview questions, and formed the question in a way to determine if any further presences of fashion as art exist, the attitude of the industry towards this concept, and appropriate locations to display the final collection. Ten target participants were recruited for this study, including fashion designers, illustrators and photographers, conceptual fashion store owners, visual artists, gallery owners, and product and interior designers, all of whom are actively involved within the fashion and art industries in the Arabian Gulf. The participants were contacted initially by email, with follow-up phone calls to further confirm details, however it was notably difficult to secure interviews. Due to the significance of Dubai and Abu Dhabi within the United Arab Emirates and the Middle East as a whole, these two cities were chosen for the recruitment of target participants. All participants became known through either Art Dubai or an internship at a fashion retail location within the arts district of Dubai (Aserkal Avenue). Prior to conducting interviews, this study gained approval from the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board. Age, sex, ethnicity, education, and income level were not determining factors for the selection of participants, although both

industries have self-imposed limiting factors which determined the availability of participants such as income level, a requisite observed to be notably present within the region. All participants agreed to be voice recorded and consented to having their names used within this study.

The interviews took place at locations convenient to the participants, including the studios in which they worked, the studio in which the collection was later produced, and cafés within the arts district in Dubai. These locations proved to be successful not only because of the ease of access for all parties, but also because of the visual references which they provided, including artworks which were currently on display and works made by the participants. The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes depending on the participant, as they were meant to be loosely structured conversations around the subject of fashion as art. A semi-structured interview was used as a method of data collection as it allowed for the organic volunteering of ideas surrounding the issue, however prompting questions were utilized in some interviews to further the discussion and touch upon areas which were not addressed. It also allowed for more personal reflection on the part of the participants, giving them freedom to discuss certain ideas through to completion and then move the conversation along with guiding questions serving only to bring the conversation back to focus.

Participants were encouraged to discuss subject areas which included art within the region, fashion within the region, personal opinion on fashion as art, attributes of fashion which allow the title of fashion, and attributes of art which permit entry into the art world. Participants were also asked to describe their experience of clothing, certain aspects and attributes that attract them, and how these changed the way in which they interact with their clothing. Depending on the nature of the participants' respective careers, inquiries as to how their work related to the

subject and specific goals in their professional life ensued. This method facilitated an understanding of what attitudes towards art and fashion existed within the region, and specific to the resulting creative project, what traits of a work allowed or disallowed its membership in the worlds of fashion and art.

The qualitative data were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Coding method was used to identify and illuminate common themes and consensus found among participants, as well as any opposing opinions and how these manifested. These themes were identified and compared by counting the frequency of occurrences that participants spoke to a certain subject, the number of occurrences specific to the participant, and the nature of the comment, be it supportive or argumentative. These parameters were used within the creative process to produce objects which, in a well-researched and informed attempt, could exist within both worlds.

After establishing these parameters, the process to disseminate the research findings through an arts-based creation commenced. In total, five looks and six separate garments were produced which, based on the results research, attempt to qualify as both fashion and art within the Arabian Gulf. The design process began with a review of the findings of both the observant and qualitative research, which established certain focuses and are discussed later, processes and goals as important to the creation of a collection that was both fashion and art. Following this, a concept was developed, and initial sketches were created. Manipulation of both fabric and paper on a mannequin aided in identifying specific shapes and patterning techniques. The materials were purchased from the fabric souk in Kuwait City, Kuwait, a large collection of fabric stores and haberdasheries. It was selected as an appropriate source for materials because of combination of price, quality, and variety of fabrics, and also as a way of including the country within the design process, as it is one of the countries within the geographical research region.

Following this, and because different light spectrums were used within the photoshoot, a professor of physics in Dubai was contacted to gain a thorough understanding of light, how it would interact with the collection, and how the photos would display this interaction. After this consultation, the process of converting a semi-professional camera into a full-spectrum camera began, a necessary tool in capturing the infrared spectrum. The garments were photographed upon completion, with only minor post-production edits to ensure an accurate representation of the effects of various light spectrums.

CHAPTER FOUR: OBSERVATIONS, FINDINGS, AND DISCUSSION

Research Stage 1: Observations, Dubai Art Week 2014

Prior to conducting any interviews, a general knowledge of the art and fashion scenes within region had to be gained. This consisted of personal observation and participation during Dubai Art Week, March 2014. During this time, multiple design and art happenings occurred, including Design Days Dubai, Art Dubai, and Sikka, all of which were attended. Through observing and interacting in these events, two key fields of knowledge were gained, being an understanding of the nature of the art industry within the Arabian Gulf region, and secondly the existing interactions between fashion and art which were accepted and promoted by the events.

The art scene within the region was observed to be heavily internationally influenced, by both the galleries present or the works presented. This influence extended to both the geographical origin of the work as well as the theme and concept utilized, meaning that a strong Arabic or Islamic presences was observed within some individual works, but not at a notably high rate. Galleries from around the world were present, bringing with them a host of works in a variety of mediums, some which included fashion elements. The Global Art Forum featured guest speakers with diverse backgrounds, both culturally and occupationally, one of whom later became a participant for this study. While Sikka was more locally focused, it also served as a platform for international artists and influences. Design Days, while being more design-focused than art, featured the works of individuals from around the globe, as well as workshops and presentations that became another source of participants. Some conclusions drawn from this observation participation were that the region is highly engaged in developing and promoting an art and design scene; that it is being built in a predominately western fashion, with galleries

featuring various works; that the idea of history and concept are emphasized and a certain exclusivity is assumed by those involved.

In terms of artworks which related direction to fashion, elements appeared in a variety of forms including photography, with a strong focus on garments, cloth and stitching used on canvas and installations, and fashion items, such as shoes and clothing, used directly as a form of sculpture or installation art. Some examples of these works include Majida Khattari's "Houris," a painted photograph, Hassin Sharif's mixed media installation featuring woven fabric and spools, and Bharti Kher's "Memories of an Old Peeling Wall," a hung work comprised completely of bindis. These artists, hailing from Morocco, the United States, and India, respectively, utilized fashion-related elements throughout their work for its visual, cultural, and conceptual values. The presence of fashion elements within these works served to open the door to further fashion and art interactions, priming the audience in a way which was validated and justified because of the authoritative atmosphere of an art show.

The region proved to be an accepting and diverse art scene, and although not entirely locally produced, it was welcomed and celebrated. The accepting community, in terms of contemporary art, design, and ideas, minimally displays influences within the art that could be considered Islamic or Arab, which is in line with the cultural make-up of the region. While Islamic and Arabic influences are found, they in no way dominate or dictate the aesthetic of the region.

Research Stage 2: Interviews

The fashion and art scenes within the United Arab Emirates, as a leader within the Arabian Gulf, proved to be as diverse when explored through in-depth interviews as was found when observed through Dubai Art Week. The participants, while all being involved in either the

fashion or art industries, had little in common apart from this interest, with varied backgrounds, educations, genders, ages, and countries of origins. The cultural makeup of the participant group included individuals of Bolivian-French, German-Lebanese, Iranian, Pakistani, Austrian, Emirati and Filipino origins, with all either being born and educated, or spending a significant amount of time in their countries of origin (see Appendix 1, Table 1). These diversities produced results which, in some areas, unanimously agree and disagree on aspects of the fashion industry, the art industry, and how fashion can operate as art. However, notable differences were also observed.

During the coding process, prominent themes began to emerge (see Appendix 2, Figures 1-8). The first theme presented is an overview of the creative industries within the region. Participants discussed aspects including local initiatives, the infancy of both the fashion and art industries within the region, any critical analysis of the industries, the quality of work which is being produced, and finally, a characteristic which is believed to account for some of the disagreements: the transient and expatriate populations of the region.

Following this, some of the remaining themes that emerged, which included Arab and Islamic influences, international influences, consumerism in relation to fashion and art, and communication through fashion and art, related directly to the literature reviewed with similarities and differences emerging. Finally, through examining the interviews, the themes necessary to making the creative aspect of this research surfaced, including developing the design process, the design process itself, and the value systems which need be applied to the collection, all necessary for the manifestation of fashion and art.

Through review of these themes and comparison to the literature reviewed, similarities, differences, shortcomings, and areas which need additional research avail themselves for discussion. With the creative, the importance of multiple points of dissemination is also

highlighted, both through the visual imagery and concept explanation, as the findings of this research are present within it, along with the research paper.

Local Initiatives

Often mentioned (more than 25 times in 10 interviews), local initiatives were presented as being both common and determined in nature, aiding in the development of the art scene within the region. Offered by participants were not only specific initiatives but also characteristics of the new and developing industry. According to gallery owner Umer, there is a hunger found within the region, with consumers taking an interest in locally produced goods. All participants agreed, however sources of inspiration and originality were often noted as lacking within the region. Adnan, a watch designer, suggested that a lack of points of reference for local artists exists, given the region's relatively recent interaction with the currently employed creative industry model. Jamie, a fashion design student at the University of Sharjah, is in accordance with this concept, noting that the region is lacking the education needed in order to guide the industry in producing, the public in consuming, and understanding conceptual objects, fashion, or art.

This lack of inspiration and originality within the region is, however, being met with a desire to develop and change. Hernan, a product designer who recently moved to the region, noted that designers and artists were developing their own sources of inspiration, however still remaining somewhat conservative in terms of art appreciation. Nazy, an artist and journalist, noticed the same trend, and a desire within producers and consumers to develop something unique. Peter, a fashion photographer and conceptual fashion-store owner, observed that some confusion exists within the region, as changing approaches towards fashion and art have served to blur the previously preferred clear boundaries between the two. Rowdah, an Emirati interior

designer also cited this change, noting that although initially seen as a hobby, practicing art and design is increasingly recognized as a profession, although still within the early stages of acceptance. These shifts and changes are completely intertwined with the developmental stages of the creative industries within the region, with all participants citing the infancy of the design and art practices.

Infancy of Fashion and Art

Branching directly from the amount of time that design and art have been practiced using the current system employed within the region, the infancy of the industries was spoken to by all participants. These opinions and offered observations differ from those discussed as local initiatives in that they looked at what was being produced from a more critical stance. Hernan noted that the region is a curious place, and is not yet ready to be folded in with the greater international art scene in terms of production, but that it was only a matter of time. He also suggested that because the region is participating within the larger international art scene, which is heavily based on a Western understanding of art, that more time is needed to establish a base formed by the history of the industry with all its movements and developments. To learn such a history in such a short time is not possible, and again, will just take time. Umer offered a similar thought that the region was on the verge of development. Kourosh, a contemporary art gallery owner, spoke to this idea of Western art, suggesting that different needs and demands were found between Old World and New World markets. However, it can be suggested that this gap is closing, as more and more, the Western world moves into the Arabian Gulf through expatriates, design labels, and art.

A recognized way in which the region is participating within the infant fashion industry is through consumerism, a subject addressed by participants involved in both fashion and art, and a

subject which will be discussed further. They presented this practice as part of the way in which the industry was developing, noting that more interest was taken in established luxury brands, thoughts which align with Al-Mutawa's (2013) research. Both Jamie and Rowdah noted a lack of interest and support for local up-and-coming designers, and perhaps taking an even stronger stance on the issue, Kourosh noted a lack of integrity within the industry. Adnan, a local designer himself, stated that "just because it's not good design, doesn't mean it's not design," an opinion that aligns well with Kourosh's ideas on the short-sightedness of emerging markets, which are only concerned with a 3-year period: one behind, the current, and one ahead.

Quality of Local Products

Also related to the infancy of the region, quality of art and clothing was a topic of conversation that was illuminated through the interviews. Participants referred to quality in two senses: manufacturing and conceptual. Specifically related to clothing, Umer, Hernan, Nazy, and Peter all stated that many locally designed garments were of poor quality, with Umer asserting that in many cases, professionalism and ethics are lost. Adnan affirmed that producing locally may even have consumers questioning the quality of the garments, and that local production within the region, unlike other areas of the world, has no merit. In terms of intellectual quality, Hernan and Peter both asserted that a conceptual approach is lacking, similar to Jamie's previous suggestion that the wrong type of education was being provided, if creators were even educated at all. It was with an air of frustration that many of the participants questioned why consumers were not being more demanding and critical of the products of the region.

Critical Analysis

The type of critical analysis which occurred during the interviews, as presented above, is a dialogue that some of the participants assert is simply not happening within the Gulf in relation

to the creative industries. Umer directly stated that the localized industry is free from questioning and criticism. Kourosh agreed, stating that the understanding of the past, a concept previously mentioned by Hernan, is not being acquired, which in turn hinders any critical analysis of what is being both produced and consumed locally. Jamie also attributes a lack of education on the subject, stating that it is not that education is unavailable, but that the right type of education is unavailable, again hindering any types of critical dialogue. Jamie's idea on education plays a role in the next subject which was discussed by some of the participants, the expatriate and transient nature of the region.

Expatriates and Transient Nature

A topic which was quickly and freely addressed by some of the participants corresponded to the demographics of the UAE and other countries in the Arabian Gulf, consisting of a high number of expatriates living within the region, and the transient nature of these populations. Thought to be a major contributor to the developing creative industries within the region, most expatriates were presented as making a minimum time commitment, often on single-digit year plans. This, according to Umer, affects the development of the art and fashion industries, with different ideas constantly being brought into the region, and then sustained. Adnan agreed, suggesting that because the population is so transient that "tastes are not localized, not organically local; everything is from outside," making it difficult to suggest, or even find, a strong Arab or Islamic influence on design. Hernan, indicating that approximately 80% of the population are expatriates, noted that influences are from everywhere in the world, something which Jamie believes to have liberalized the creative industries to a certain degree.

This transient and expatriate quality of the region brought forth ideas which later were integrated in a critical way within the creative dissemination of the research findings. Many of

the participants cited experiences outside of the United Arab Emirates and talked about education obtained externally or internally through expatriate instructors, and past professions which were instrumental in forming their expressed opinions. These assorted histories, and the resulting different viewpoints and ideas, can be related to Durkheim's (1895) ideas on reading objects and their incorporated functional symbolism, an ability specific to each individual based on their past experiences, culture, and education. Through addressing this quality of the Arabian Gulf region, the literature with any strong assertions of Arabic and Islamic culture can be explored in conjunction with the interview findings.

Observation 1: Conservative and Islamic Influences

Throughout the literature review, research relevant to the region was analyzed, with a notable focus on conservative and Islamic influences emerging. As anticipated, this heavy reliance of academic literature on a conservative-dress dialogue as a theme was seldom addressed by participants, with only four participants speaking to it, and with a level of emphasis that does not nearly compare to that placed upon it within the known literature. Rowdah, the only Emirati participant within the study, a proportional level of participation when compared to the country's population as a whole, did mention the abaya, a conservative garment explored by Al-Qasimi (2010) as a representation of a modest dress paradigm and national identity. However, it was not mentioned in a way that emphasized conservatism, but rather as a culturally specific starting point, as many local designers first started with this garment because of a demand found within the market. Nazzy noted how this garment has changed in appearance, perhaps a result of international influences, as suggested by Jamie. Regardless of the reason for change, this observation aligns directly with Al-Qasimi's findings, which highlighted the trade-off between conservatism and self-expression.

The limited way in which participants explored the idea of modest and conservative dress, when fashion was one of the specific subjects being explored, helped to illustrate the imbalance in available literature and the tendency to focus on these notions of conservativeness in relation to the Middle East and Islam. The sole participant whose work related directly to Arab culture was eL Seed, a calligraffiti artist, who uses the Arabic language in his work. More commonly cited were international influences over localized influences.

Observation 2: International Influences and Expatriate Communities

Spoken of more often than local influences, international influences were discussed at length by participants, sometimes in a very direct manner, such as eL Seed's observation of the practice of importing international artists and ideas, and other times in a more indirect way. This indirectness is indicative of the constant presence of a strong international community, market place, and overall impact. Umer, in discussing his clientele, notes that "they have an understanding, they have style, they travel, they live abroad," casually suggesting that these attributes are almost synonymous in nature, occurring in conjunction with one and other. That is to say, in order to have style, one must have traveled and lived abroad. Adnan refers to the region as a "massive giant free zone airport," and notes that, as with the rest of the world, the region does not live in isolation, there is no local, everything is influenced.

In discussions on the importation of an international aesthetic, Hernan noted some of the more detrimental aspects of doing so, including creating an environment dependent on consumerism, branding, and a fast-fashion model. He suggests that because of the variation in cultures found within the region, this model is being employed without understanding, and often without comprehension; a practice which he views as dangerous. Other participants also noted

the excessive consumerism found within the region, which according to Jamie is legitimized because it plays into the frequently imported Western approach.

Observation 3: Consumerism, Consumption, Fashion, and Art

Consumerism and commercialism of fashion and art objects were spoke of often by participants, in conversations which spanned the subjects of luxury, status, commercial gains, and trends. From these dialogues, assertions on how fashion and art can be viewed emerged, some aligning with the expressed ideas found within the known academic literature and others opposing, perhaps indicative of a change in regional ideas on the subject.

Luxury consumption, a common practice in the region and a by-product of large amounts of wealth, served to not only legitimize the consumers, a notion touched upon by Al-Mutawa (2013), but also the artists themselves. While being a subject spoken against by Kourosh, eL Seed views collaborations with luxury brands as a way of gaining validation in the eyes of local consumers, something which he felt directly after collaborating with Louis Vuitton. Rowdah also observed this phenomena, noting how high-priced abayas and the profits gained from them resulted in the designer being taken more seriously by consumers. Jose, through his experience working at a conceptual fashion showroom, spoke of how consumers preferred known, luxury, branded goods. This idea of brand buying, which also relates strongly to Al-Mutawa's findings, brings forth the idea of status consumption.

Within the region, status consumption of both fashion and art, which in this research will be defined as the act of buying particular goods because of what they communicate about the consumer, was suggested as a common practice by many of the participants. According to Rowdah, consumers in the region prefer "well-known designers," and as stated by Jamie, luxury and branded goods are appreciated more than something conceptual. Adnan and Hernan agree,

with Hernan suggesting that “only the logo and only the prestige of the brand” determine a consumer’s interest in it, not the concept. Luxury brands, as noted by Al-Mutawa (2013) are consumed because of what they are able to communicate about the owner, rather than what they communicate independently as object. This practice is similarly seen in art consumption within the region.

Umer, who observed this directly through his work, noted how people buy under the pressure of appearing fashionable, with the act of buying art being seen as such, creating an identity similar to that which Wattanasuwan (2005) spoke of. This idea of status consumption was confirmed by Nazy, who mentioned multiple times that there was a local (meaning Emirati) collector who purchased Banksy. For her, this communicated not only wealth, but a liberal mind-set, an individual literate in the international art scene, and a sign of progressive action and thought. Adnan noticed how this idea of status through art not only affected consumers but producers as well, and suggested a disproportionately high perception artists had of themselves within the region, simply for being artists. The idea of being able to purchase fashion and art brought forth opinions on how and if a separation between the two was present based on consumerism and the ability to buy.

Nazy, when asked about consumerism, was quick to note that it is a global phenomenon, but that there is a specifically strong presence of it in the United Arab Emirates because of the degree of affluence experienced. Rowdah noted that her community, being Emiratis, participated in a high level of consumerism, a pastime which Umer saw as being pushed within the region and Jamie thought of as so deeply anchored that it will take a long time to change. Jose also agreed, citing the example of Karl Lagerfeld, suggesting that Dubai will be the next fashion capital, and asserting that the latter will be the fashion capital of consumption, but definitely not

of design. The designs produced within the region are seen by Hernan and Rowdah as playing into this notion of high consumerism, being made to sell rather than for concept or love of design. Kourosh carried this idea further, stating that the high level of consumerism is embarrassing, to both producers and consumers, and that the act of overpurchasing cheapens luxury goods, making them less desirable to those who look at the region critically.

Peter, Hernan, and Kourosh commented on how consumerism affects garments in regards to their status as art. Peter noted that fast fashion as it exists within the region cannot be regarded as a fine art, but that the art of making money, a serious art in and of itself, is done extremely well within the Arabian Gulf. For Hernan, the inability to purchase an object positions it as something of value, allowing it into a space where it could be considered as art, however locally, goods are only designed with commercial considerations.

However, to position anything that can be bought or sold as not being art would be completely incorrect, which was noted by Hernan and other participants alike. He made the assertion that, although pricelessness is one way of positioning an object as art, “art is part of the capitalist way of living,” citing the 1960s, Andy Warhol, and his interactions with consumerism. Consumerism, he stated, is not responsible for the flaws which exist within the art industry, an idea which eL Seed also entertained. Although having a business plan and treating art as a serious endeavour is necessary if a practice is to become a career, eL Seed believes that the object, be it fashion or art, must be created for the love, and not commercial gains. Even with this notion in mind, however, Adnan offered a question which he believes most makers within the region ask: “but will it sell?” Having the minority view between the participants of this research, and perhaps the region as well, Nazzy corrected the term “art industry,” being unhappy with the suggestion that art can be produced on an industrial level, and that “business” was more

appropriate. Peter disagreed in saying that the fashion and art industries are always looking for the commercial value in design.

This commercial value is something which Kourosh spoke passionately about. He expressed, “I hate artists and their art being utilized for clearly commercial purposes,” and cited various collaborations between large luxury brands and visual artists. For him, commercialization kills the sanctity of the art industry, and that in this regard, there are major differences in the way the art market and the fashion market operate. Hernan noted a difference between the fast-fashion model and other design, holding it accountable for bad design with a focus on only commercialization, driven by sales. This discontent with how the fashion industry operates was seen as a quality of not just the fashion industry but the art industry as well by eL Seed, who noted the negative impacts of sales-oriented design processes. This notion of sales-driven design feeds into the idea of mass production, which was explored by participants in regards to both fashion and art.

As previously stated by Hernan, mass production and resulting consumerism is no stranger to the art industry, a view which was shared with Peter, who spoke to the old paradigm thinking on art, that pieces should be numbered and limited in quantity. This old paradigm however was met by artists such as Warhol and Kuntz, who went against the norm and incorporated mass production into their practice. Jamie believes that, although only seen within the fashion system locally, mass production and consumption for both producers and consumers is something that is influenced by the abundant presence of malls and supported shopping habits, something which only education can curb. Rowdah shared the same opinion, noting the amount of replicas found, both locally and internationally produced, and shared with Kourosh, the opinion that this type of mass production is far from the practices of Warhol and Kuntz, and not

categorized as fine art. Kourosh went on to say that this sort of mass production and consumption takes advantage of emerging markets such as the Arabian Gulf, and suggests that consumers of fast fashion are irresponsible and uneducated, qualities which he feels most who participate within the art industry do not share.

Feeding into this mass-production model, the constant change in trends and movements within fashion were seen as aspects the industry not shared with fine art. eL Seed, while admitting trends do exist in the fine art world, suggested that these trends differ from those found in fashion as they do not participate in the act of constantly pushing towards the top, but rather emerge in a more organic manner. Jamie viewed the consumption occurring within the region as closely following industry trends, and expressed a unique quality which she possessed, being not overly concerned with mainstream movements.

These quick changes within the fashion industry, according to eL Seed, Kourosh, and Rowdah, help differentiate the art scene both locally and internationally, as none wish to participate in such a model. eL Seed suggested avoiding marketing art in a way that creates or caters to trends in order to preserve the longevity of the works, and Rowdah cited the lack of interest in new arts within the region as an indicator of an attachment to a more static industry.

While fashion and art, when framed through their belonging to a consumeristic system, can collectively communicate certain aspects of the fashion and art industry, including the above demonstrated attributes such as status consumption, trends and mass production, conceptual communication eludes both practices. This idea of concept, which was mentioned previously as being undervalued and underappreciated within the region, is one of the key elements identified by participants as uniting both fashion and art.

Observation 4: Communication Through Fashion and Art

The communicative power of art, a defining and undeniable attribute, was recognized by all participants. eL Seed spoke of his personal practice, and that through his works, ideas at play within the localized community in which he worked gained a visual voice and presence. Jose noted art's ability to make the viewers feel, while Kourosh expressed the way in which the artwork communicated through knowledgeable clientele. Hernan noted communication as a requirement within art, that even through attempting to avoid communication, an artist is communicating. It is the ability of an object to speak that illuminated fashion's close connection with art in two ways: through the visual voice of the designer, and the visual voice of the wearer.

Conceptual clothing, an idea explored by Jamie, has developed within its stories and messages, and serves as a medium of self-expression. One of the designers incorporated deep-rooted concepts within her garments, at all stages, aligning with Boodro's (1990) thoughts on the similarities between creating fashion and creating art. Kourosh, Rowdah, and eL Seed described the way in which the wearers, not the designers, employ their agency and, rather than succumbing to the message of the designers, the wearers create their own message in the way they dress, and expression of their identity and live stage. Fashion, as a medium of self-expression, brings with it many of the aforementioned characteristics of art, by communicating status, possessing a certain level of worth, being the only or one of few, and evoking emotion.

A noted way in which communication is achieved, through the appropriation of symbols, was presented by both Nazy and eL Seed. Each artist, however, took a different stance on the subject. Nazy saw the use of symbols as a method of communicating certain values and beliefs, a view shared by Davis (1994). eL Seed, taking a contrary view, spoke to the way in which symbols are devalued and disrespected when utilized by fast fashion. What once held great

meaning is now mainstream, and while being part of the dialogue artists wish to engage in, the fragmentation and appropriate confusing of the viewer, leaves eL Seed asking what message is being sent, if any message at all. Kourosh believes that it is excessive consumption and participation within a fast-fashion mode that leads to mixed messages, while Nazzy expressed a different view on the subject, seeing the freedom as leading to more effective communication.

For some participants, art serves no further purpose beyond that of communicating and causing emotion, a characteristic not shared with fashion. eL Seed asserted that there is no utility in art, but in fashion, even at the most basic level, there is a reason for clothing to be worn. Kourosh agreed, stating that “the beautiful cannot be functional,” and believed true perfection is achieved in an object when simultaneously it can be spectacular and not serve a function. He would prefer to see objects as proposed by Hume (2006), utilizing an aesthetic theoretical gaze. Jose went further on the subject, suggesting that fashion is only art after functionality has been removed and limited to the same level of functionality that art possesses. Other participants disagreed with this idea; however, for Hernan, being passionate and inspired by functionalism, the beautiful is functional. The idea of expressing no function at all was viewed as rendering the question on the interaction between functionality and art null, since through expressing a lack of function, the object is communicating.

Observation 5: Developing the Creative Process

While the previous observations pertain specifically to the art or fashion object, be it through its place in both space and time, consumption habits surrounding it and the ability of the object to communicate, participants also spoke to the processes involved in creating it. Inspiration was cited as a requisite, being something that, according to eL Seed, makes an object art. Peter shares a similar view, suggesting that anything which comes from creativity is art. Both

Rowdah and Jose held the opinion that art serves as an inspiration to fashion, and through taking inspiration and applying it to design, fashion can be produced. Rowdah noted that inspired fashion could qualify as art, however not all fashion is inspired. From this inspiration, concepts are developed and if applied to fashion, further argue for its inclusion in the greater discourse of validated fine arts. The idea of inspiration relating fashion and art again relates to Boodro (1990) and his idea of similar inspirations found between the two.

Concept Relates Fashion and Art

Speaking to designers in general, Peter explained that designers approach projects with serious concepts, and for Hernan, a concept is something so personal, and “so big that you cannot handle it,” something which cannot be ignored as a major component of any artwork. In regards to fashion, Peter believes that designers “develop from that concept a language which is translated into clothes,” something that he can definitely entertain as an art work. Through actively providing a concept to a clientele, fashion brands communicate through single pieces, collections, or, as noted by Hernan, through the brand as a whole, as the overarching concept is within its DNA.

Again, the idea that not all fashion is art was present, with Rowdah offering details about her personal consumption habits, expressing curiosity in the concept of some pieces, while others she appreciates for aesthetics alone. Jamie, Jose, and Peter all observed, through work experience, how clients are not always interested in the concept, in line with Rowdah’s reflections which list attributes such as quality, fit, and silhouette as factors which often override the concept. Jamie attributes this lack of interest in the concept to a misunderstanding in the fashion world, specifically within the region, about what exactly is conceptual fashion, and how this interacts with wearability and prestige. However, even with the current misunderstandings,

Umer believes that when designers engage in dialogues on history, values, and art, concepts are created within the garments, which ultimately lends them to being perceived as art.

Intention of Artist

Involving concept within a work, be it fashion or art, demands a certain degree of intent on the behalf of the maker, placing an importance on their relationship to their work. Most participants agreed that it is vital for the makers to intend to make art, regardless of medium, and that without the intention and without applying concept, a work will not be art. This is supported by western literature, a commonality between the two regions, through the work of Carroll (1999). However, Kourosh brought forth an interesting notion when he offered the opinion that if a garment is placed within a specific setting, numbered, and not worn, all done with the intent of making art, it could be art. By following through with these intentions, the work becomes art; however this assertion brings forth the question of whether the object could still be fashion.

Hernan holds the opinion that it is difficult to begin by making art, then attempt to turn it to fashion, just as it is difficult to begin by making fashion and attempt to turn it into art. Both tasks must be taken on simultaneously in order to produce a work which can be dually classified, however he notes that this is not a common practice within the region. This practice of having unestablished intentions in creating is perhaps partly to blame for the misunderstandings spoken of by Jamie, expanding on her assertion that the wrong type of education is being delivered within the region. Uniting fashion and art, according to participants, and moving beyond the idea of intention is a certain aesthetic sensitivity experienced by makers of both fashion and art, a concept which extends to the audience, or consumer, of objects.

Aesthetic Sensitivity

Aesthetic sensitivity, although difficult to define, is a feature which participants attributed to both fashion designers and artists, allowing for the overlap of their work and supported by Kim (1998), Feldman (1973), and Miller (2007). Kourosh explained how being sensitive to aesthetic results in a sensitivity to clothing, and Jose observed that clients who appreciated more conceptual clothing were also active within the art scene, as both producers and consumers. As an artist who makes clothing, Nazzy identified design as a learned practice, one which she personally had not undertaken, so to refer to her as a designer was incorrect. Jose commented on the idea of need, with aesthetic needs being fulfilled by clothing designers. As a quality, aesthetic sensitivity is found not only in clothing and art, but the exhibition of both as well. This presentation, however, is also strongly associated with the idea of performance and spectacle.

Spectacle and Performance

Fashion, and specifically fashion shows, were viewed by some participants as performances, an art unto its own, however the elements of this spectacle did not necessarily qualify as artworks when removed from this context. Kourosh inquired about this very concept, noting incidences of fashion elements such as fabric, stitching, and garments being utilized within art works and installations, and wondered if these specific pieces of fashion could still be considered fashion, or if their involvement in the greater work rendered them mediums. Peter also addressed this notion of installation, performance, and spectacle, separating them but still considering all serious art works. Continuing on the tangent of spectacle, Nazzy spoke to the art of walking within certain garments, emphasizing movement, communication, and performance through dress. The ability of fashion items to be utilized as aspects of art makes their presentation an important factor to consider when trying to position fashion as art.

Observation 6: The Making Process

Value in Production

After identifying elements to be considered in the design process, specific information offered by participants relates strongly to the making process. Many participants found value within the production method itself, pertaining to quality, seriousness of practice, and the utilization of skill and craftsmanship within the object. Hernan emphasized a love for the materials, something which for him bars fast fashion from being art. He considers art to be something that is next to people, functioning beside them, and demanding energy, love, and passion. Most participants, at some point within the interviews, mentioned haute couture as something which could be considered art, not for the concept but in recognition of the skill involved. Jose took this idea further, suggesting that when viewed and appreciated as art, fashion is examined for its quality and process, a consideration not always applied to other visual arts. The notion of quality was touched upon by Adnan, who observed a low quality in production within the region, perhaps partially responsible for the lack of fashion garments accepted as art within the Gulf.

Applying Fashion to Art

Quality in production was addressed in conjunction with applying art to fashion by the participants, notably occurrences of luxury brands collaborating with visual artist. Regardless of quality, however, this was not viewed as a practice that allowed fashion to exist as art. Kourosh expressed disapproval of this process, noting that it does not serve to further the career of the artist, only bringing forth higher commercial gains for the fashion company. He noted how artists had become instruments of the brands, creating sales and further publicity. Jamie emphasized the importance of drape, construction, and other design elements which allowed fashion items to

exist as art, rather than the direct application of art onto fashion. Jose, while not condemning the practice, did speak to how the fashion piece in these cases was not designed by the artists as art, but rather utilized as a canvas of sorts which separated fashion design from art practices, and did not aid in including fashion in the field of fine art. In this case, once again the fashion element is rendered a medium of an art practice rather than the result of an art practice.

Medium and Presentation

Medium, while discussed in the context of fashion as that which is utilized in creating art, was also discussed as an element which allowed/disallowed fashion's qualification as fine art, however with some ambiguity. Some participants, including Hernan and Peter, believe that art can be created in any medium, physical or otherwise, while Nazzy utilizes multiple mediums within her garments. She believes this practice helps to validate her creations as works of art. Along with medium, presentation of the final work was also discussed in terms of physical location and qualities. Kourosh elaborated on the experience of viewers and wearers when textiles are involved in artworks, thereby emphasizing the sense of touch.

Elaborating further on presentation, Peter and Jamie discussed the appropriate presentation of fashion works which they considered to be art. Peter noted that placing fashion items within a retail as opposed to a gallery setting communicated a certain commercial value to viewers and customers. Agreeing partially, Jamie suggested that garments which were to be viewed as art pieces need to be displayed in a ways which properly showcase aspects of the garment, be it in a gallery or commercial setting. She believes that although a gallery setting does lend a sense of authority to the garments, displaying on a rack does not bar their acceptance as art pieces, so long as the space is well lit and the garments are fully visible. The only participant to touch on the subject of displaying garments on a mannequin was Jose, who expressed mixed

opinions on how incorporating a representation of a body as a host for the clothing related to its acceptance as being art or strictly fashion. The notion of corporality, as a reference of or an actual body, tied in with notions of performance and spectacle, with the body interacting with the structure and possible movement of the cloth.

These opinions helped to shape the resulting creative, as the expressed beliefs assisted in forming a framework, a point where a concept could be applied. As the creative expresses the findings of the research, through interviews, a direct correlation between the opinions of the participants and the garments was a vital establishment. As a result, a sort of guide was extracted, lending limitations, conceptual inspirations, and opposing tensions from which the capsule collection materialized.

Observation 7: Value and the Treatment of Art

Value Systems

When asked about value systems, participants immediately discussed monetary value, indicative of the nature of the fashion system, an aspect criticized when discussed in terms of art, with differing opinions. Kourosh argued that fashion will never accrue the same value as artwork, while Hernan argued the opposite, suggesting that while they operate under two different types of systems, both can accrue a certain level of worth until the status of pricelessness is reached. He stressed the value added with age, and that fashion when examined in terms of context and rarity can reach the aforementioned status. After discussing monetary value, the participants went on to explore other value systems. Umer commented with respect towards the conceptual, something which he believes needs to be learned. Peter and Jamie both asserted that even though clothing is worn, the concept helps to maintain a certain level of value because of the dialogue created around it, and that these pieces can be collected in a similar way

to art. eL Seed agreed, noting the different treatment of art and fashion, and fashion that is art. Pieces are bought, framed, and hung, demanding a different type of appreciation and care, gaining worth through their symbolic sign value (Baudrillard, 1996).

Separation of Fashion and Art

With all of these opinions and offered ideas, participants throughout the interviews offered firm assertions on the inclusion of fashion as an art, some which at points in the interview contradicted their previously expressed thoughts. The idea of contradictions and differing opinions was not only found within each individual interview but collectively within the interviews as a whole. While most stated a certain degree of acceptance towards fashion in the greater dialogue of fine art, clear lines were also drawn between the two. Thoughts such as fashion and art being two serious and separate disciplines, the lack of acceptance of fashion as art academically, and a lack of connection between contemporary art and fashion illustrate the lack of unanimous opinion, even found within the individual participant themselves. However, a number of uniting affirmations were also made, with most centering on the will of the maker. Collectively, these opinions served to form the base of the creative, which itself walks the line of fashion and art. The most noteworthy observation of these interviews lies within the individuals themselves, their agency, their backgrounds, and their opinions formed. The idea of diversity and the critical opinions which come out of these differences served as inspiration for the creative work, which strives to illuminate and express the collective opinion of possibly the most diverse region in the world.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Understanding Binomia

Expressing the findings of this research within a collection required several steps, all of which were carefully thought out and formed according to the expressed opinions of the participants and the previously reviewed literature. The objective in producing this work creatively is twofold, the first which begins to put theory and findings into practice. By making a capsule collection which was presented as both fashion and art, the findings of the research were tested through positioning it as art, and continues to be as the images and garments are exhibited. Secondly, by disseminating the work creatively, a further reach in audience is obtained, with the same findings being availed to both the readership and viewership.

The process of producing the collection began with a critical review and organization of the interviews, a lengthy process considering the loose structure and conversational based approach. The first field of inquiry which materialized and was utilized was more general information on the nature of the region and the art and fashion being produced within it. Key observations made were that the collection would have potential for local support, with many of the initiatives and interests of creatives within the region being cited by the participants. As well, a future for this type of conceptual and creative approach to dissemination was identified, although not at the rate seen internationally. Complaints from those involved in the local creative industries were translated to a recognizable demand for better quality art and fashion works to be produced in the region, something this creative would have to consider. As well as higher-quality goods, higher levels of critical analysis were desired by participants, positioning this creative in a critical point in time within the developing arts industry, requiring the type of critical analysis necessary to validate this as an effective form of dissemination from a population only beginning

to do so. The final, and perhaps most significant conclusion to be drawn from this regional survey was the reality of the cultural demographics and migration patterns of the inhabitants.

The transient nature of people within the region, as well as the large population of expatriates, helped to establish the first guideline for the collection, being that Islamic or Arabic influences were not something which need be incorporated into the capsule collection. Although this research is regionally localized, and occurring within an area whose original population is known for having a strong social culture, these local influences proved to present in a way which reflects the minority of national citizens, all of whom are of Arabian Gulf decent. Within the art and fashion industries, Western influences dominate the region. This observation formed the collection in both practice and final product, and instead of communicating Arabic or Islamic fashion and art influences, it avoids the subject completely by neither standing for nor against traditional inspirations, reflective of the reality of the region.

Another consideration taken, affecting all steps of the creative, was the idea of consumer and consumption. Different opinions had been expressed throughout the interviews, some strongly advocating for the separation between fashion and art because of how they are consumed, while others cited historical references of when art was consumed in a mass-produced manner no different than the fashion industry. However divided on commercial gains and fashion, none of the participants voiced opinions on the commercialization of fashion as a means of qualifying an object as fashion or not. The conclusion from this section was that, specific to the region, the mass production and commercialization of garments positioned as art may be terms on which to disqualify them, and therefore, no commercial value or intent was prioritized within the collection. It was not made for sale, it will not be sold, and in doing so, avoids commercialization and consumerism completely.

The final consideration which fell outside of the creative development and making processes was the idea of communication through art. The participants all noted art's ability to communicate, as well as fashion. This idea of communication is exactly in unison with the idea of creative dissemination of research findings. It is through the concept development of the creative that these findings will materialize and be availed for viewing.

Informing the creative process was another set of observations, the first being the intention of the makers. The participants clearly stated that in order for an object to be art, it had to be made with the intention of it being art. They noted that working in reverse, making an object without this intent and later applying it, although often practiced within the region, was problematic. As well, participants spoke to aesthetic sensitivity and that in the creation of art or fashion a certain level is required. When being viewed and utilized, these creative objects would be exposed to aesthetic inquiry and criticism, something also to consider. Finally, participants spoke to the idea of spectacle and performance, and from these conversations, it became apparent that the garments must be displayed in a way which would avoid their participation as objects within a performance art, or as part of a spectacle. The garments themselves, and not the context in which they were being used, was to be the viewers' focus.

Even with these considerations, serious contemplation had to be given to the conceptual identity of the collection, as the observations served only as a grounding exercise, gaining an understanding of how something must be creative and positioned. This was done through word mapping, sketching, and three-dimensional modeling. Throughout the process, two other observations made by the participants were considered, being the value found within production and the practice of applying art to fashion. The materials were selected to reflect and function within certain aspects of the concept, with quality in materials and production methods being

considered at all times. The practice of directly applying art to fashion, because of the mixed opinions on it, was avoided, which allowed for none of the garments to be considered as such, only the image placed upon it.

While assisting in the creative process, and supplying a certain degree of security in terms of effectively creating a work of both fashion and art, the aforementioned considerations proved to be restrictive and difficult to work with at times. Although simply creating something visually appealing has its place, quite notably within the fashion industry, the necessity of a strong concept completely disallowed this practice. As a result, the creative, with the most informed approach possible, attempts to fill a space not yet firmly established within the region. However, limitations are found within this research. One of the defining characteristics of the region, multiculturalism, while contributing to the concept, also provided limitations in that it adequately applies to the region as a whole but not the individual cultural groups specifically with their own set of social facts. However, tangible and intangible qualities of the capsule collection fit regional preferences and requirements generally, while a strong concept built around a theoretical frame work, help to elevate these garments in value free from monetary considerations, changing how they are interacted with and bringing forth thoughts on the relationship between humans and the objects we produce.

CHAPTER SIX: THE COLLECTION

Binomia

The final collection was compiled as a catalogue, with each of the five looks displayed under all four light spectrums: visible, ultraviolet, infrared, and projection. This catalogue was presented along with the garments, as to best articulate the concept and the way in which the collection embodied it. A graphic designer was consulted, and the catalogue has been included in the same format as it was completed in, demonstrating vision of the designer for the display of the photographs, which included honesty in images, simplicity in layout, and a sense of narrative.

The way in which this collection relates to the findings of the research can be found in every step, from their conceptualization to the creation of the final catalogue. All who participated in creating this collection (a studio assistant, photographer, and graphic designer) had a deep understanding of the concept and created in a way which reflected it. Decisions made throughout the process, such as silhouette, fabric, construction methods, photography techniques, and how the garments were displayed all directly express the thoughts and opinions of participants towards fashion and art within the region. The intent of making art remained a constant with all involved, altering the value which of the collection in the minds of the makers, and through communicating the concept, the minds of the viewers. It was through the application of a concept that these garments held meaning and communicated (as does art), and it was only possible through the research that such a concept could be developed. While the presence of multiple social facts may result in different readings of the meaning which is intertwined within this collection, it still holds within it the ability to communicate and embody value.



Binomia



Expressing the tension of the binomial sum of fashion and art, the development of this collection began through gathering and analysing the thoughts and opinions of key players within the fashion and art industries throughout the United Arab Emirates, considered the cultural hub of the Arabian Gulf. That which is desired is often not found, as with complete consensus between participants, which eluded this exercise. Rather, opposing opinions on fashion's inclusion in the greater fine art dialogue availed themselves.

Utilizing in conjunction the thoughts of Durkheim and his 'social facts' and Baudrillard's ideas on value within objects, Binomia seeks to demonstrate differences through displaying the strikingly dissimilar ways which objects can appear when viewed under and through diverse applications of light. This is intended to reference the current population of the region and the variety of social facts which are culturally prescribed to individuals and accumulated within this highly multi-national area.

The light sources stand to represent these social facts, with the garments as meaning and value holding objects, subjected to the aesthetic critique and consideration, as is art. Photography was used not as the art form intended for contemplation, but rather as a means of capturing the garments –the intended art pieces- in their varied forms, allowing the concept to materialize and avail itself for dissemination, as all art works require both a maker and a viewer to actively exist.

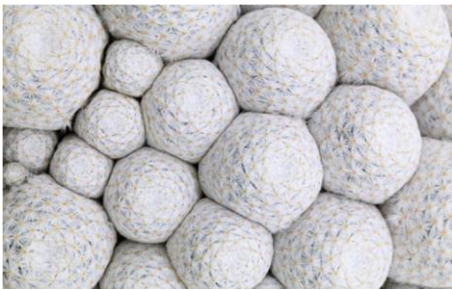
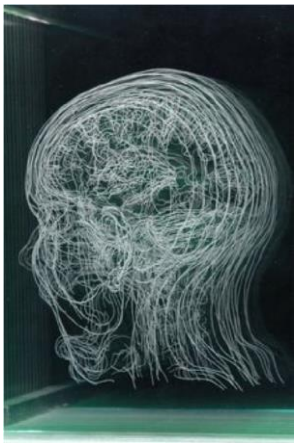
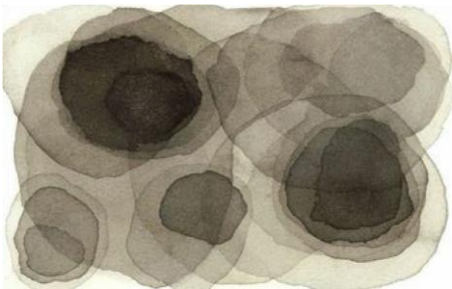
The concept development, construction and treatment of the garments reflects some of the opinions of those involved in the fashion and art industries, guiding this project to a point where consideration as both fashion and art should be possible. There is no commercial value assigned to these garments. Their display occurs on both the body and unanimated support, and their construction occurred in a studio setting with the intention of making art applied throughout.

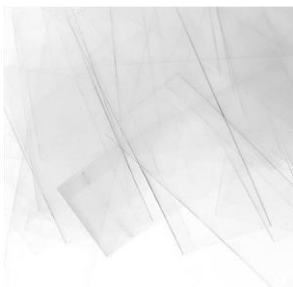
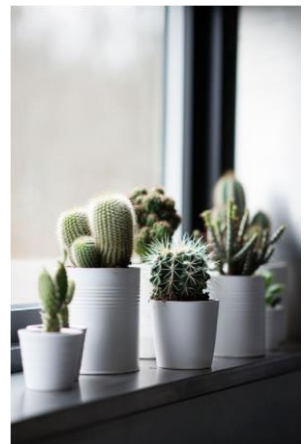
A model was utilized within the photography, however the garments were not intended to be a

medium through which performance art occurred, but rather to demonstrate the strong geometric construction of the pieces, and their ability, like the fine art and fashion industries within the region, to bend, fold and flex. A minimal setting was chosen to allow the garments to be the focus of viewers. The garments were designed in a way which best demonstrated the differences

in light, including multiple layers and voluminous surfaces on which the spectrums could play, utilizing high quality materials adding an additional layer of value.

The idea of the seen and the unseen, the projected and the actual, ideologically visible and invisible are all present within the collection, illuminating the importance of degrees and spectrums of consideration, the duality of life, and the production of binomial experiences.





Lookbook























Everywhere one seeks to produce meaning, to make the world signify, to render it visible. We are not, however, in danger of lacking meaning; quite the contrary, we are gorged with meaning and it is killing us.

Jean Baudrillard 1988

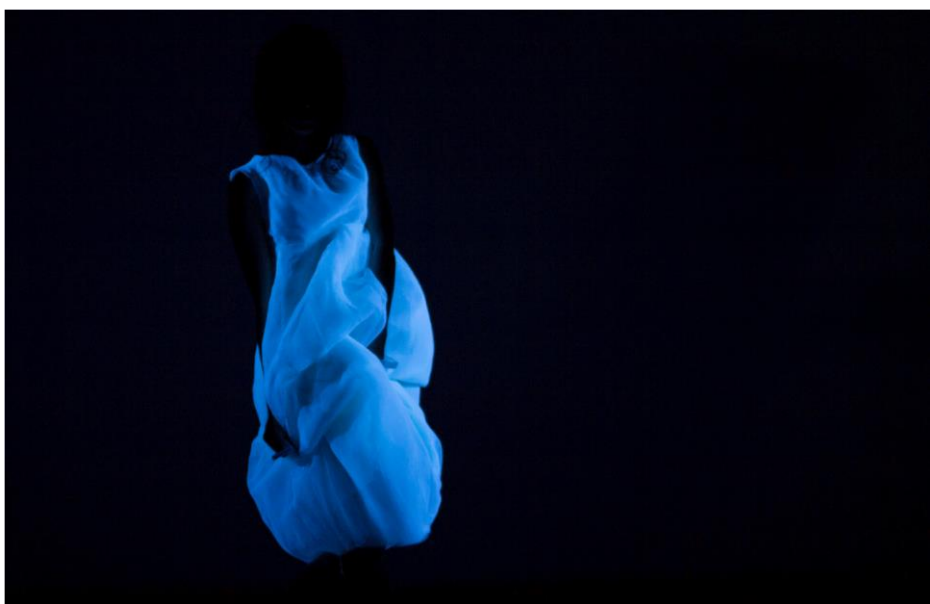
The Ecstasy of Communication











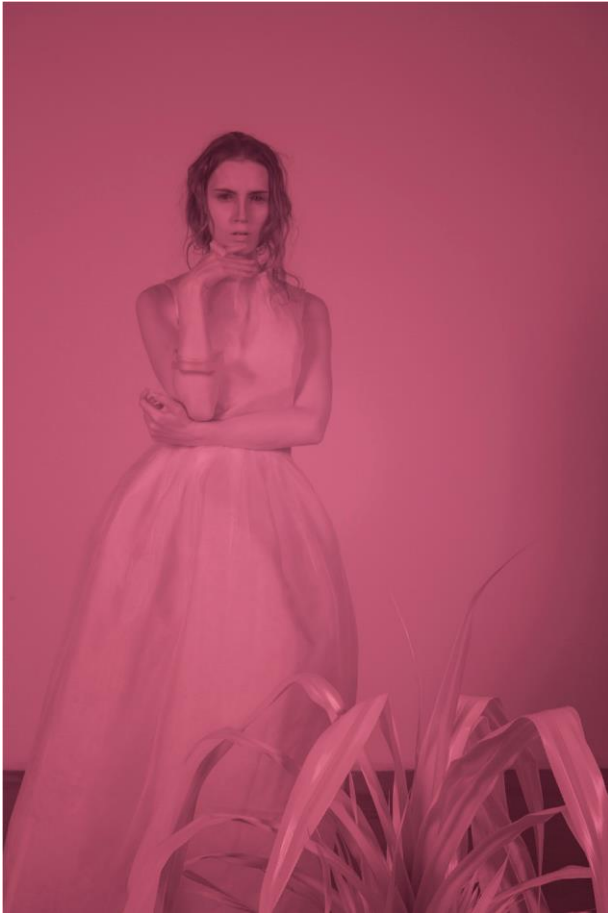


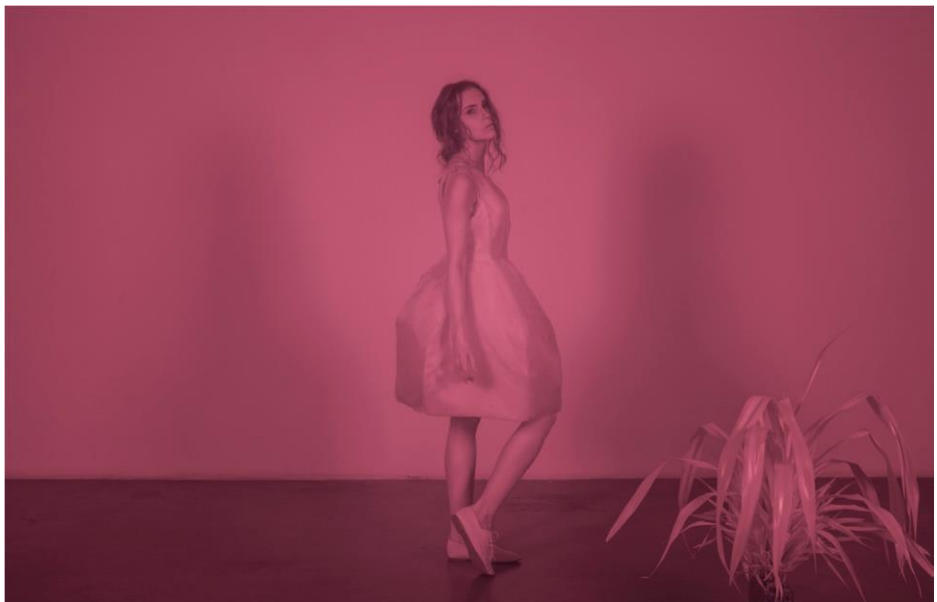
For me, the photography, in its purest form, is a variant of the fable. Another way of saving the appearances - a way of signifying, through this fabulous capture, that this supposed “real” world is always about to lose its meaning and its reality, that it actually could do without meaning and reality.

Jean Baudrillard 2005

The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact













Sociological method as we practice it rests wholly on the basic principle that social facts must be studied as things, that is, as realities external to the individual. There is no principle for which we have received more criticism; but none is more fundamental.

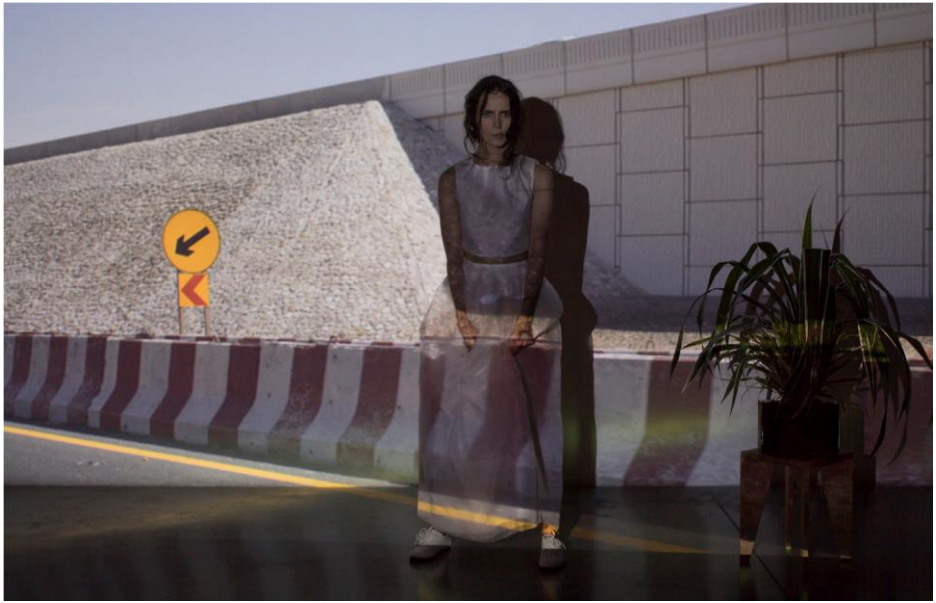
Emile Durkheim 1897

Suicide: A study in Sociology









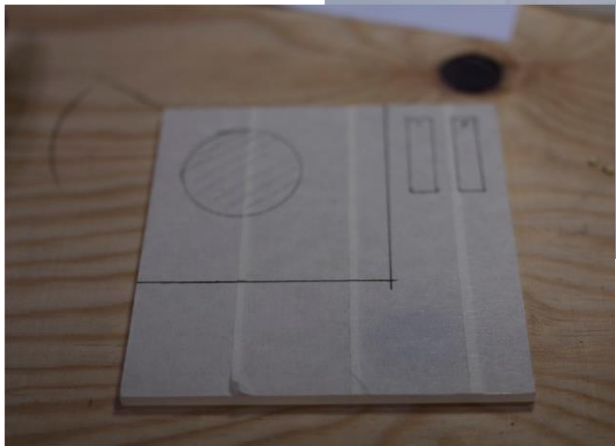


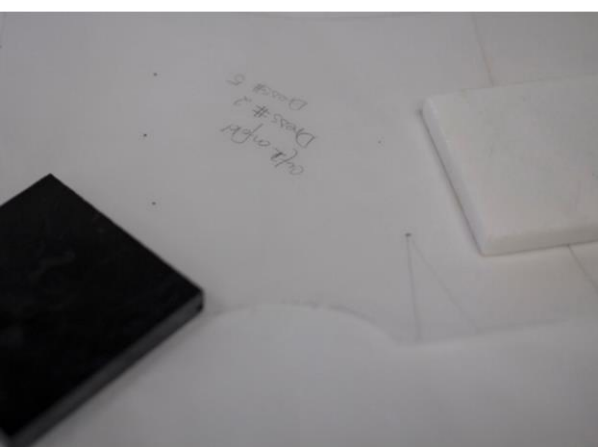


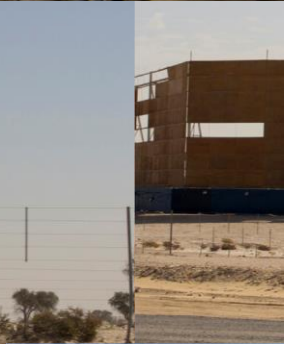
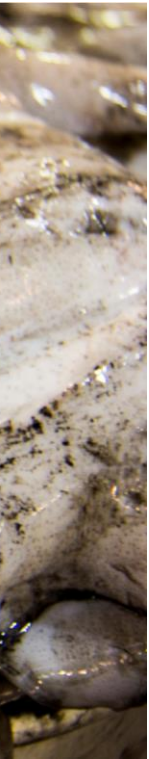


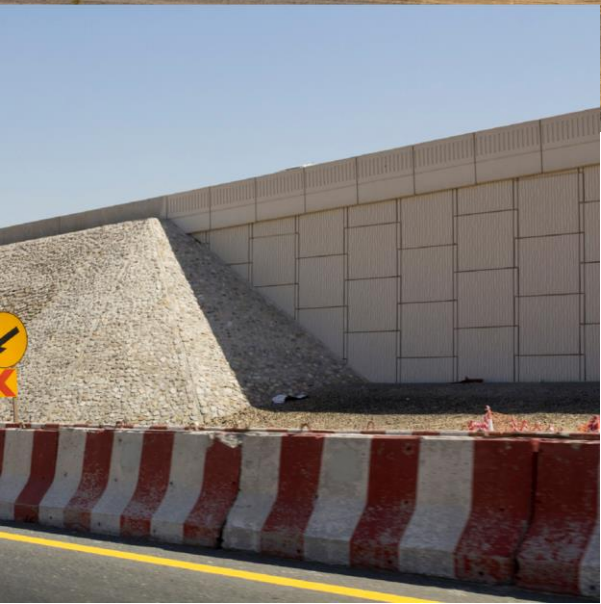














Appendix 1: Participants

Table 1

Participants

Participant name	Occupation	Gender	Nationality
Hernan	Product Designer	Male	Bolivia, France
Jose	Fashion Buyer/Illustrator	Male	Philippines
Kourosh	Gallery Owner	Male	Iran
Nazzy	Artist	Female	Iran
Peter	Fashion Photographer/ Concept Store Owner	Male	Hungary
Rowdah	Interior Designer	Female	United Arab Emirates
Jamie	Fashion Design Student	Female	Germany
Umer	Gallery Owner	Male	Pakistan
eL Seed	Artist	Male	French, Tunisa
Adnan	Watch Designer	Male	Pakistan

Appendix 2: Research Findings

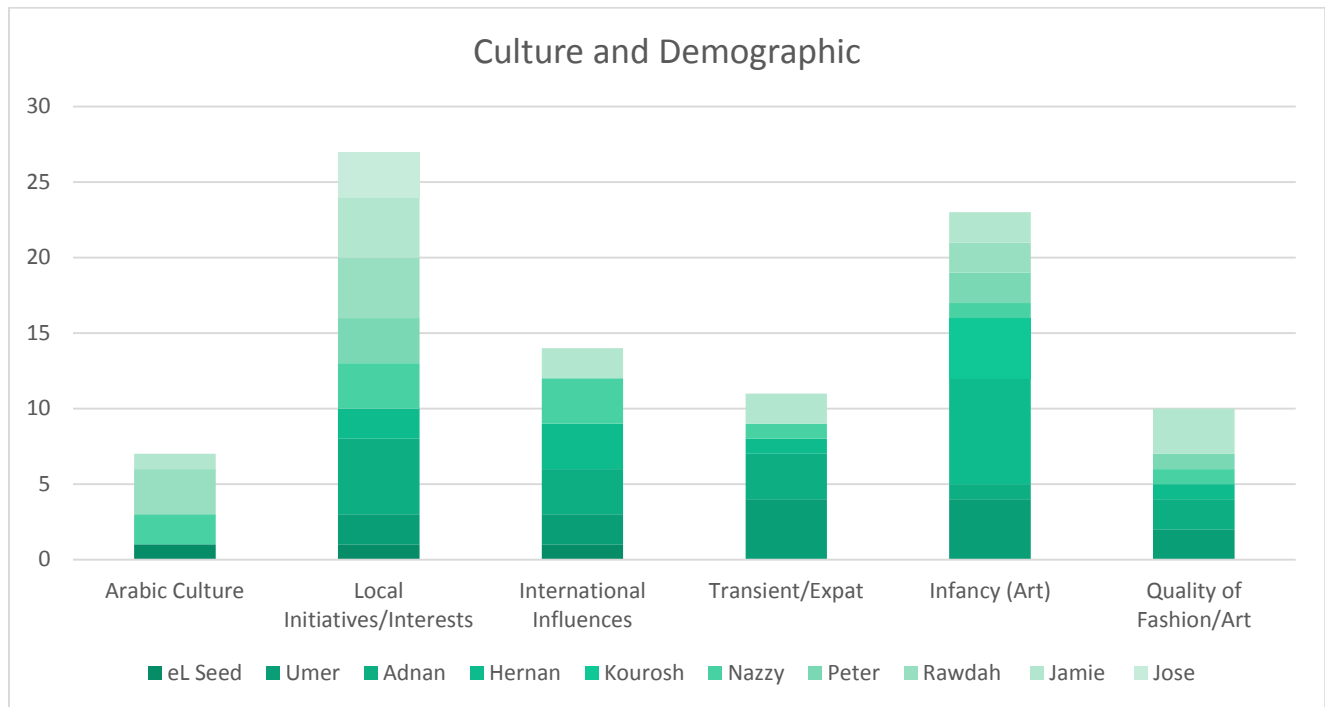


Figure 1. Culture and demographic.

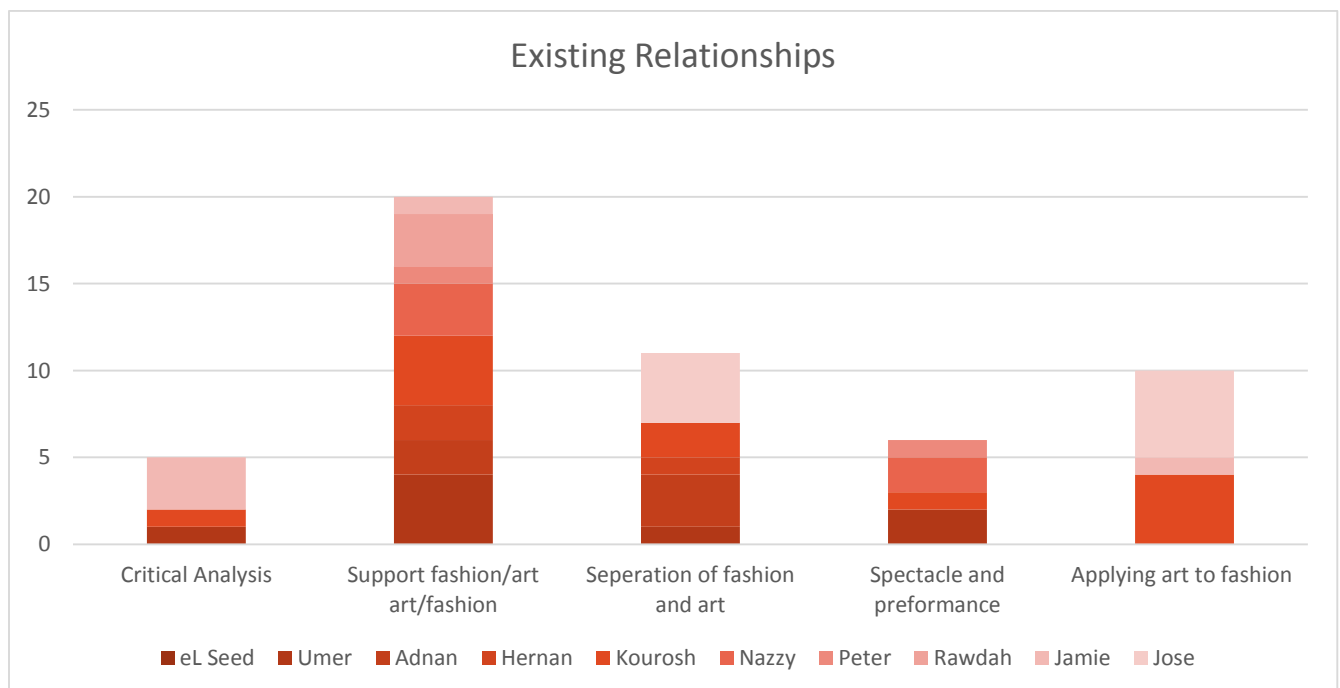


Figure 2. Existing relationships.

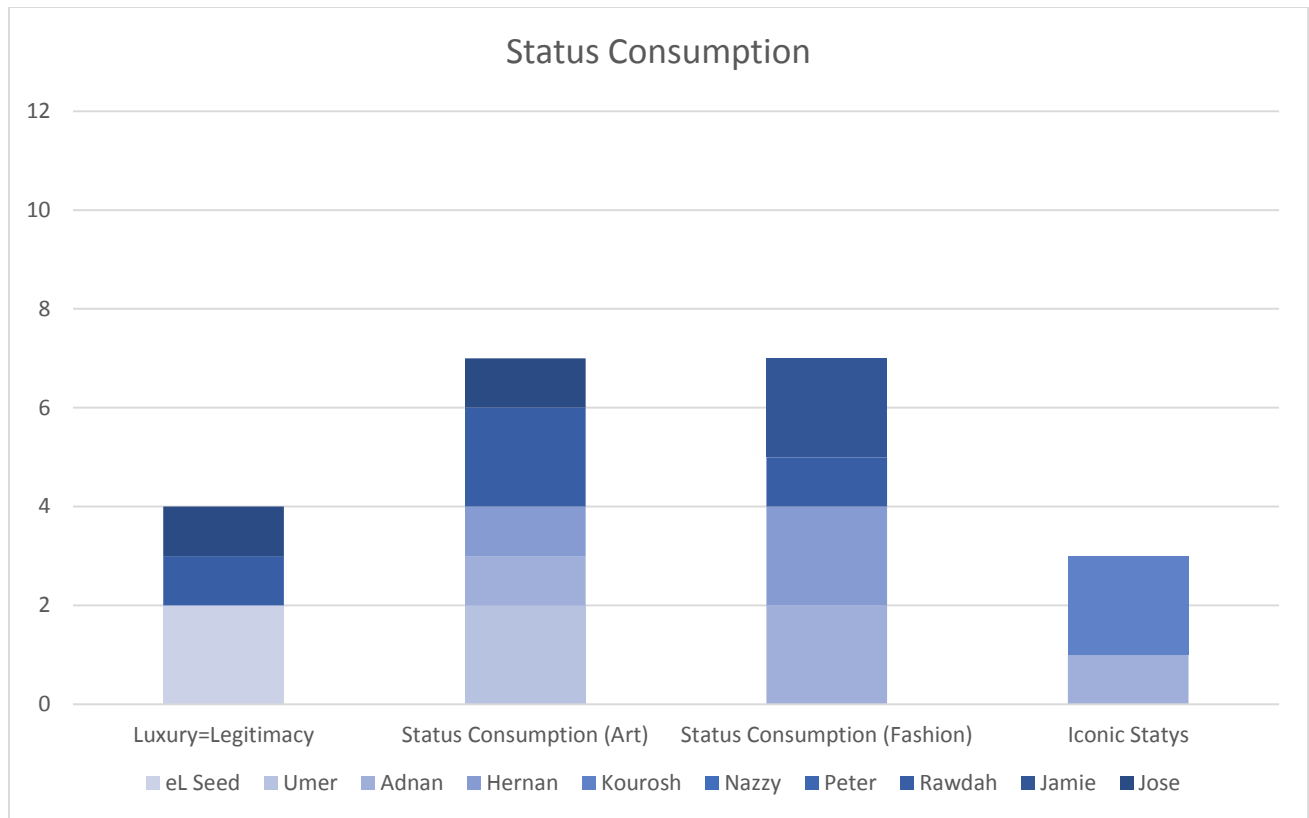


Figure 3. Status consumption.

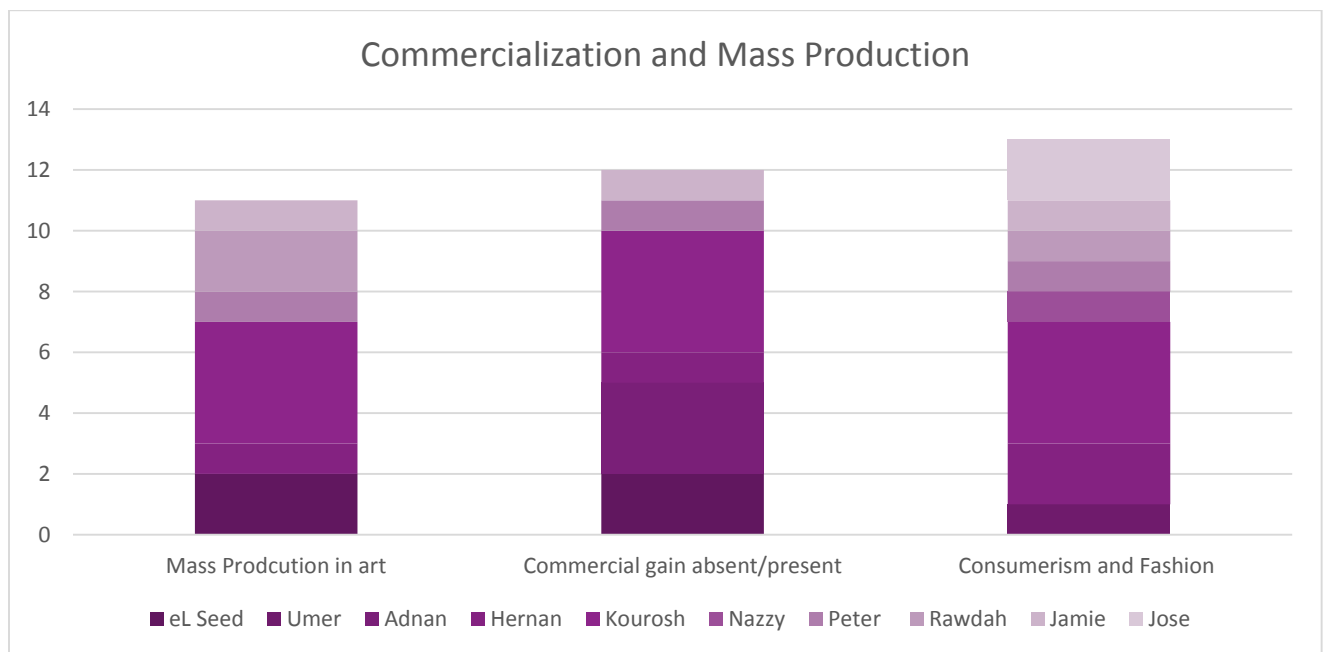


Figure 4. Commercialization and mass production.

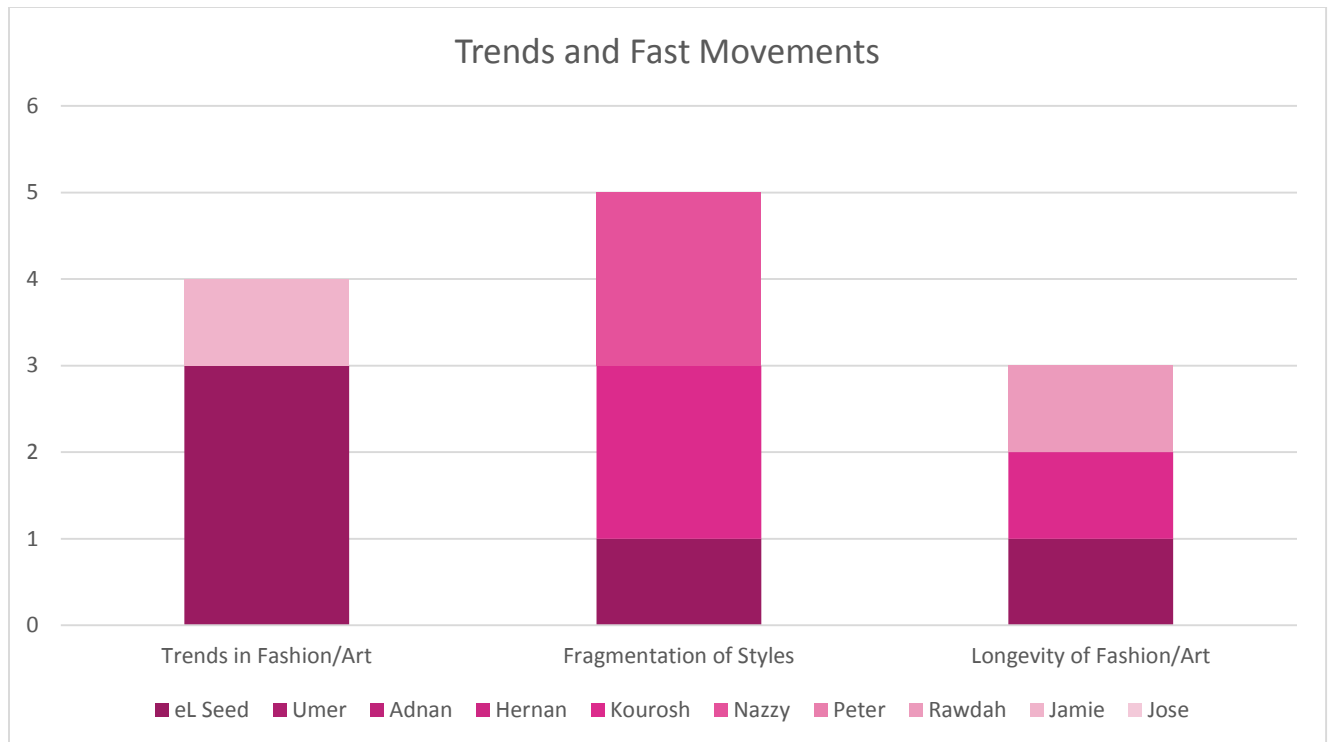


Figure 5. Trends and fast movements.

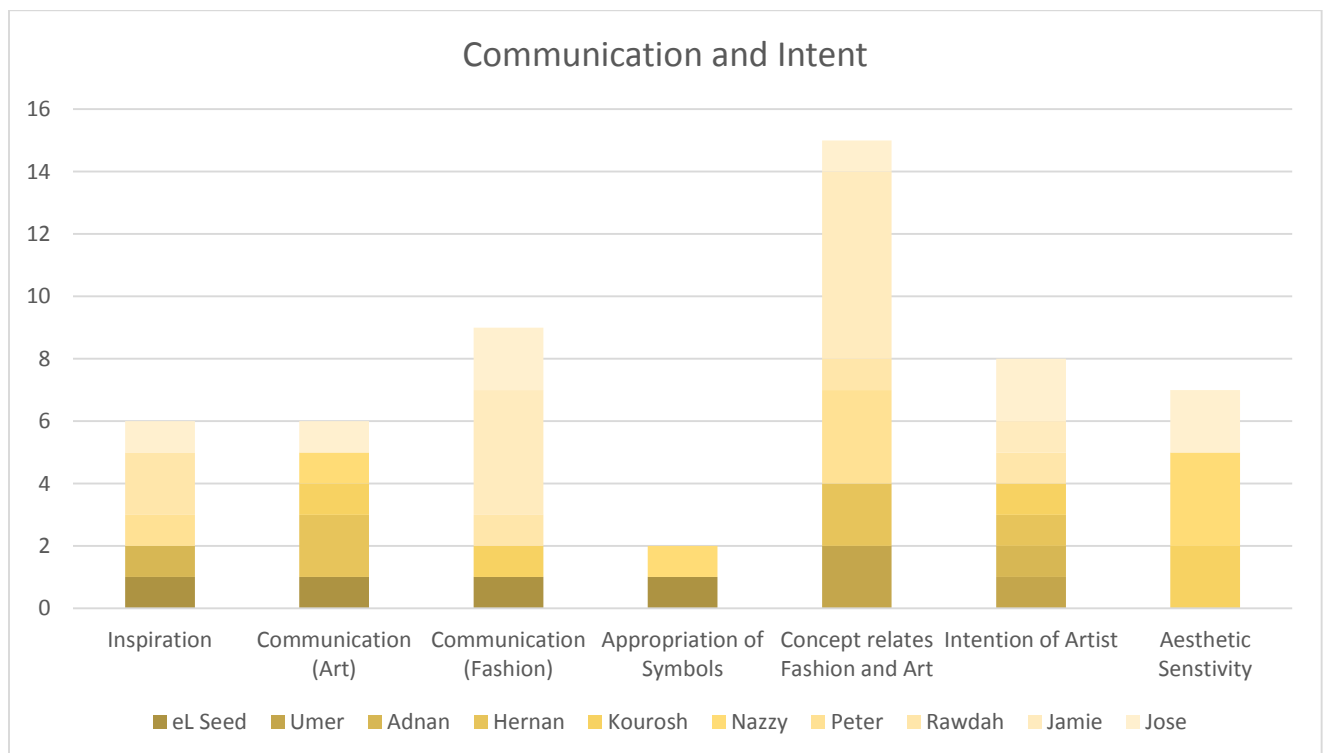


Figure 6. Communication and intent.

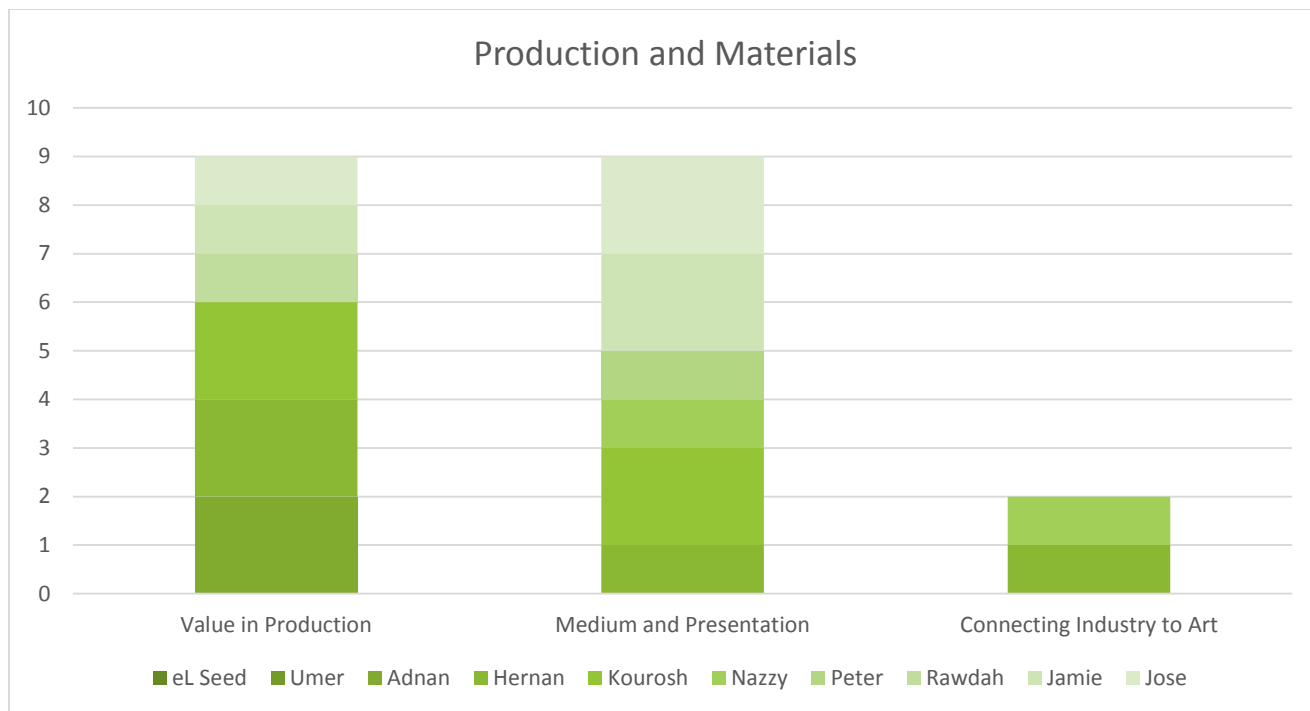


Figure 7. Production and materials.

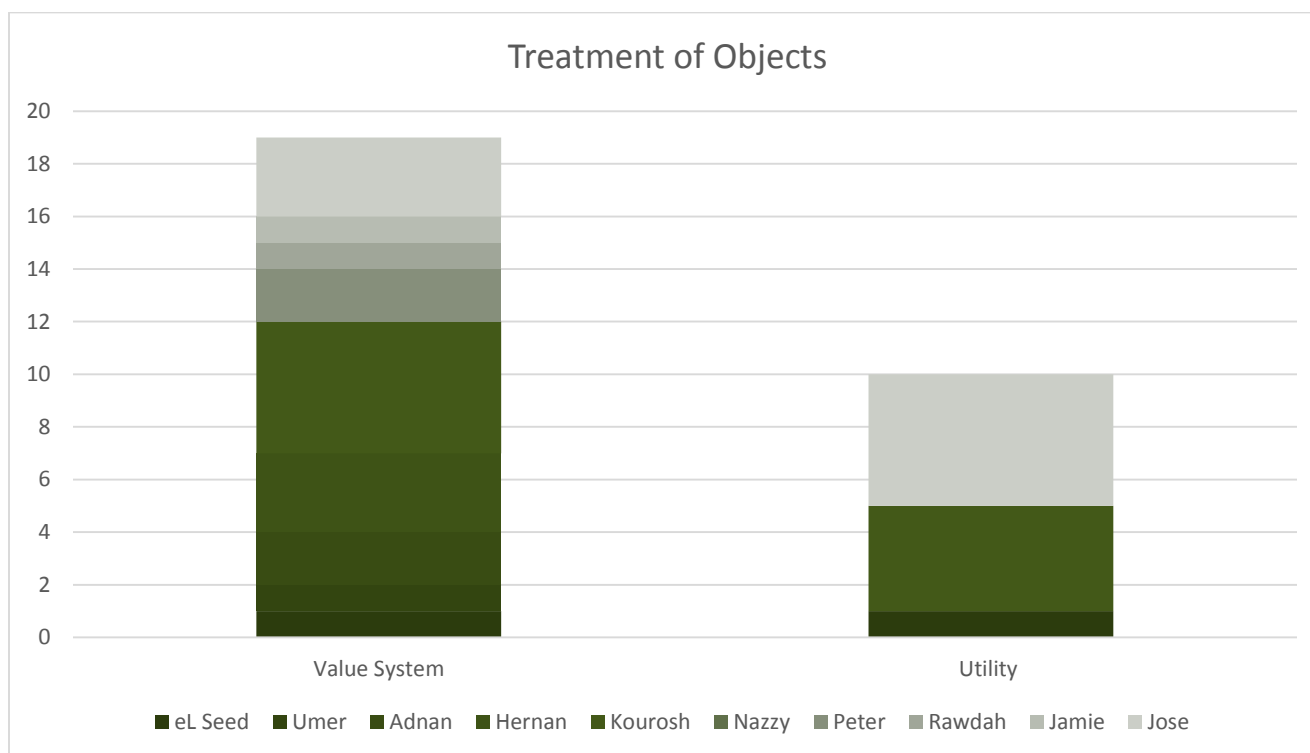


Figure 8. Treatment of objects.

Appendix 3: Consent Agreement



Ryerson University Consent Agreement

Title of study:

Binomai: An Exploration of Fashion and Art in the Arabian Gulf

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to be a volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Investigators:

Maggie Jonk, School of Fashion, Master in Fashion Program, Ryerson University

Purpose and Description of the Project:

The study which you are being invited to participate in has a three-fold objective, with the first being to broaden the academic literature on fashion in the Middle East by focusing on fashion as art within the region. Secondly, this research will examine the attitudes of producers and consumers towards clothing when it is viewed as expressive and a valuable component of culture. Finally, through the creative element of this study, an intended dialogue around value in clothing and how it relates to the current fast fashion model, compared to a slow fashion model, will be initiated. Your involvement will include a semi-structured interview, in where you will be asked to discuss your relationship to clothing and experiences with it, in relation to art. The interview will be audio-recorded, and will take about 45-90 minutes of your time. In this study, some demographic or personal questions include age, income, education, and occupation will be asked. Apart from demographic and personal information, other questions will be focused on clothing consumption, involvement in both the fashion and art industries, and the relationships between the two. If any discomfort arises during the administration of the interview, you may skip the questions, or discontinue participation - either temporarily or permanently. The results will be only used for education, and publication in academic journal and conferences. In addition, if you prefer to be interviewed via Skype, please sign this consent agreement and email it back to me.

Discomfort and Benefits of this Study:

There is no obligation to answer any questions or to participate in any aspect of this study. Risks associated with participating in this study are minimal, for example, it may cause discomfort when answering some of the questions. You may choose not to answer any questions you don't wish to answer, or end the interview at any time. If you feel uncomfortable during the interview process, you may discontinue your participation either temporarily or permanently without any negative consequences. There is no intended or anticipated direct benefits to you, except you will receive a token of appreciation for your time.

Confidentiality:

All personal data will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet for three years in the researcher's office, and the records will then be destroyed. The researcher and her supervisor will be the only individual who will have access to your responses. The researcher could use the results of this study at educational conferences or to publish papers in academic journals. You will be given an opportunity to have access to the general results of this study when available.

Voluntary Nature of Participation & Incentives to Participate:

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time and choose not to answer any particular questions for any reason without penalty or negative consequences. You may also withdraw at any time up to four months after participation. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed. At any particular point in the study, you may refuse to answer any particular question or stop participation altogether. In addition, a token of appreciation will be given to you by the end of the interview or at any time that you withdraw from the interview permanently.

If you have any questions about the research, please feel free to ask. In case, if you have questions that you may want to ask later on, please contact me via email or phone.

Maggie Jonk
Email: mjonk@ryerson.ca
Phone: 416-704-6784

If you have questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this study, you may contact the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board for information.

Lynn Lavallée
Research Ethics Board
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation
Ryerson University
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3
Email: rebchair@ryerson.ca
Phone: 416-979-5042

Agreement:

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement.

You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

I am allowing the researcher/Research Assistant to audio tape the interview as part of this research.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator/Research Assistant

Date

I am allowing the researcher/Research Assistant to conduct the interview at my home.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator/Research Assistant

Date

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