



CRINOLINUM

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DEDICATION

To those who have been made to feel less-than because of their body.

You are loved.

When we think of the past it's the beautiful things we pick out. We want to believe it was all
like that.

— Margaret Atwood
The Handmaid's Tale

...Diamonds and pearls
Tumble from my tongue.
Or toads and serpents.
Depending on the mood I'm in.

I like the itch I provoke.
The rustle of rumor
Like crinoline.

I am the woman of myth and bullshit.
(True. I authored some of it.)
I built my little house of ill repute.
Brick by brick. Labored,
Loved and masoned it...

—Sandra Cisneros
“Loose Woman,” *There are Girls like Lions*

For difficult women, who should be celebrated for their very nature.

— Roxane Gay
Difficult Women

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Crinolinum

by

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My work is an exploration of how women transform their bodies in order to meet societal standards of beauty and fashion. I'm interested in how women of the Victorian era utilized underpinnings, then at the height of exaggeration and extreme, to alter the shape of their form. Underpinnings are garments—bustles, crinolines, and panniers—that were used to achieve the ideal body shape. My goal is to dissect these historical examples and see how they compare to contemporary conceptions of beauty.

The evolution of furniture draws parallels between historical garments and upholstered chairs; the fashion of underpinnings is essentially wearable furniture. My process sources materials that women use to manipulate themselves in order to achieve what society would find aesthetically beautiful and socially valuable. These underpinnings acted as a home, a place of comfort, but falsely represent women's bodies through exaggeration. Women began having a new experience in which their bodies were no longer accepted in domestic settings. Chairs became a problem, the new baggage carried by the body was cumbersome, creating an uncomfortable situation, rather than somewhere to relax. A new disdain is felt for chairs, the cushion that was once soothing is now pushing in all the wrong places.

Our bodies are precious and private, but throughout history and to this day, women have used structures that unknowingly harm the body, weighing it down in unnatural ways, all in the name of beauty. Interested in exploring these ideas of perceived beauty, I'm also drawn to the idea of what makes something seem feminine versus grotesque and unnatural. Using scavenged palm leaves, combined with upholstery materials, chair parts, and natural fibers, my MFA body of work evokes feminine aesthetics paired with natural materiality, while paralleling forms of underpinnings and representations of the body.

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CHAPTER 1

THE ORIGIN OF MY BUMROLL

Our bodies have been subjected to strict rules and scrutiny by society for centuries. The preferred body shape can change quickly, seemingly on a whim, often times even while we are still developing as individuals. Women in the Victorian era would wear large contraptions and squeeze their body into unrealistic forms in order to achieve impractical shapes. Throughout my research and work, I was inspired by a quote by writer and professor Roxane Gay from her memoir *Hunger*: “This body is resilient. It can endure all kinds of things. My body offers me the power of presence. My body is powerful” (296). In *Hunger*, she reflects on past trauma in her own life caused by her body, others’ perception of her body, and daily challenges she endures.

Growing up in the conservative Midwest, I had conflicting feelings about my body and the bodies around me. I was told to cover up and hide, while the media and films expressed the opposite. At a young age, I was influenced by the magic of Disney princesses, not only by the fairytale story of their lives, but also by their dramatic fashion and physique since both seemed to defy reality (see Figures 1 and 2). I saw styles change from large hoop skirt and tiny waist to formless and flowing while still featuring a small waist. This huge variety in dress sparked my curiosity in the history of Western fashion. In the Victorian era, fashion was modest, yet the physique was inherently sexual. There was a forced plumpness that always perplexed me; while these thin-framed women desired to achieve a voluptuous body, a body like mine that has a natural fullness to it is shamed and put under an extreme amount of scrutiny and criticism. An example of this criticism, written in *Corsets and Codpieces* from the nineteenth century is as follows:

A stout woman should not wear a tailor-made dress. It marks the outline too decidedly and throws every pound of Flesh into relief. She must deny herself bows in rosettes of ribbon at the waist, both back and front, as this adornment adds to its size. She ought not to wear short sleeves, as the upper part of her arm is

sure to be too fat and look like a ham. A ruffle around the throat will not suit her, nor a very high and tight collar. She ought to have her dress slightly open in a point in the front, or her collar a little turned back. A feather boa is the only one which will not shorten the neck too much. short basques will make her look ridiculously Stout.

Wearing the hair low down will not be becoming to her. She ought to dress it high up on her head, without dragging it too tight; the front should not be plastered down. A certain carelessness in arranging her hair will be best for her, and she must not oil it too much. Patterns with large flowers, or large or small checks, must be avoided for her mantles and dresses. Stripes and plain materials, or small patterns in one colour, are all that she can allow herself and she should wear dark shades.

No jewels, no pearls round her throat, no earrings, and only as many rings as are indispensable. Sleeves high on the shoulder and with tight cuffs must also be avoided, and she should not wear tight gloves. (Bowman 157)

Each piece in my MFA body of work, *Crinolinum*, addresses a specific theme, whether it's more about materials or forms. The work is designed and fabricated in a way that makes the idea of the body approachable and meant to intrigue the viewer by using materials in an uncanny way. This work confronts issues in Fashion and Media, asking the viewer to examine the work through this lens. Just because fashion has changed, it doesn't mean progression in women's rights and clothing have time to stand still.



Figure 1. A woman being dressed in a crinoline for a ball. Source: Bowman 89.



Figure 2. Illustration of various gowns from the 1800's. Source: Bowman 69.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORY OF THE WORD

The word “crinolinum” is derived from the history of the word crinoline. Gernsheim explains:

Jupons de crinoline are mentioned as early as 1840. These petticoats lined with stiff horsehair cloth (Latin *crinis* = hair, *linum* = linen) more recommended as being ‘very tight and cool, and make the dress sit beautifully.’ From this time onward, therefore, it is not entirely incorrect to speak of the crinoline, though it is usual to reserve this designation for the separate metal-cage crinoline introduced in 1856. (27)

A “jupon” is a tight-fitting garment that is often quilted and worn under medieval armor. Underpinnings are their own sort of armor, but wearing them comes at a price. In this chapter, I discuss a short history and description of underpinnings, as well as the dangers they cause. Crinolines were first conceived to replace multiple heavy and hot petticoats since they gave the wearer a boundary around them that kept them cool. But what did these undergarments add in terms of substance to our history?

ARTIFICIAL BODIES

In seventeenth and eighteenth century, Westernized fashion started to become artificial to the point where the body was no longer its own shape, and the mass production of these synthetic forms began to overcome the natural ones. This trend was at its peak during the rise of the Industrial Revolution when crinolines and the like were able to be mass-produced. Clothing was sewn by hand until the invention of the sewing machine in the 1800’s made clothing items cheaper and more accessible. The use of color became cheaper as natural dyes were used less and less with the invention of synthetic dyes. This also created more of a strain in the hierarchy of colors, referring to the distinctions made between levels of society by Sumptuary Laws, restricting dress to protect the fortunate. Bowman comments in *Corsets and Codpieces*, “There was no more a contentious Victorian fashion, both for the

‘fair sex’ who wore it and the male population who were forced to accommodate it, than the crinoline” (Bowman 88). The crinoline was seen as a monster.

Crinolines became so fashionable that they were adopted by virtually every woman in the Western world. It was reported that “even servants wore the skirt, and commented on its abject practicality...The only difference seems to be the quality of the crinoline across the social orders, with ugly Ridges of Steel bands visible through thin fabrics for wearers among the working class” (Bowman 88). Quality and size determined where one sat in the social order: a woman of leisure can be seen being dressed in an extremely large crinoline in Figure 3. The main differences of crinolines across the classes were that women of leisure wore larger crinolines (up to six feet in diameter), the quality of the steel hoops degrade the cheaper they are made, and the more expensive they were the more hoops they had giving the skirt a fuller appearance.

The most common underpinning according to *The History of Underclothes* was situated on the rump as “...a large roll pad, tapering at the ends and tied round the waist. It was stuffed with cork or any light cushion stuffing...The revival of this ancient device [in The Victorian Era] seems to have appeared, in the fashionable world, early in the 1770’s” (Willett and Cunnington 91). These items, referred to as “bumrolls”, were sold at “Bum-shops (see Figure 4) [that were] opened in many parts of Westminster for the sale of cork bums, and report says they go swimmingly on. Tall ladies, and short ladies – fat ladies and lean ladies, must have bums...” (Willett and Cunnington 91). Neither the class nor the shape of the body, underpinnings were a must for a lady.

MODESTY AT A COST

Despite the ideal of a prim and proper lady, the fashion of the Victorian period created a look that was exaggerated, obscene, and ostentatious. On a daily basis, most women wore a small crinoline or bustle, saving the large bell-shaped crinoline for special occasions. Even though crinolines on the larger side were not necessarily worn daily, “due to their heaviness and robustness, crinolines had disadvantages that completely outweighed the advantages... [and] wearing them in the summer meant spending the day in hot, unhygienic conditions. The biggest [issues], however, [were] fatal” (Smithfield).



Figure 3. A woman being dressed in a large crinoline. Source: Polansky.

Since the crinolines were so large in size, it was challenging for women to maneuver through their surroundings, “and thus there were thousands of reported cases of ladies being severely injured or burned alive” (Smithfield). As shown in Figure 6, something as simple as “a candle or a spark from the fireplace would accidentally flame by touching the crinoline” (Smithfield). Moreover, crinolines were worn to the workplace by the middle and lower

classes where hoops would get caught in the machinery (see Figure 5), although, more commonly, the crinoline wearer would be “run over by carriage wheels” (Smithfield) when sitting on a horse drawn carriage. All these instances caused serious problems for the wearer and were often fatal. At what extremes were women willing to go to fit in?

At the time, these were not unlikely ways to die. For instance, “in the days when candles, oil lamps, and fireplaces lit and heated American and European homes, women’s wide hoop skirts and flowing cotton and tulle dresses were a fire hazard, unlike men’s tighter-fitting wool clothes” (Smithfield). It was forewarned that a man’s dignity was lost when the crinoline came into play, that

men were in danger of being killed by their wives’ and daughter’s skirts. In one instance when a man tried to pass a woman wearing a crinoline in a busy street, his foot caught in her crinoline and he fell into a gutter where a passing Brewers dray [or wagon] ran over him, crushing his legs, although taken to hospital, he died four days later. (Bowman 93)

The driver was exonerated and the woman was to be prosecuted, but she was never found. It seemed that even if you did not wear a crinoline, you would still be in danger by association. Reading through stories of crinoline related deaths, it seems incredulous that anyone would put themselves through potential dangers, such as catching aflame, being pulled under machinery, or being swept up by strong gusts of wind and drowned (see Figure 7). Bowman comments:

Were there ever a crinoline insurance company established it could not possibly withstand the constant claims, fire escapes should be provided in all drawing rooms and air tubes within the Petticoat might all be filled with water (and it means to eject it) thus making every lady her own fire engine. needless to say, none of these schemes came to fruition. (93)

In order to be safe and look the part, there would be a huge amount of stress put on the wearer of a crinoline. They would have to be highly aware of their surroundings, as their new underpinning could be up to six feet wide, and be cautious of the weather, as wind could blow their skirts over.

Crinolines had many layers, and unlike men’s clothing they did not feature pockets externally. Pockets were a feature item in any lady’s wardrobe. They would be hand embroidered, hidden between layers of petticoats:

From the seventeenth to the late nineteenth centuries most women had at least one pair of pockets, which served a similar purpose to the handbag today. Unlike a

handbag, however, pockets were rarely if ever seen as they were usually worn underneath the skirt, usually tied around the waist under a lady's petticoats. To access her Pockets a woman simply had to slip her hands into slits in the side seams of her gown and into the opening of the pocket. Men didn't wear separate pockets, as theirs were sewn into the Linings of their coats, waistcoats, and breeches. Many pockets were handmade and they were often given as gifts. Some were made to match a petticoat or waistcoat, while some were made over from old clothes or textiles. Pockets could also be bought ready-made from a haberdasher. (Bowman 64)

Pockets were a special and private item, usually used to carry fruit and cakes (see Figure 8). Women generally did not carry money unless they were lower class, so pockets were for functional items and treats. It wasn't until the late 1800's that women were allowed to own property; any money that "belonged" to them legally belonged to their fathers or husbands. Handling money was seen as improper, so women would have a man, such as their butler, husband, or brother, purchase items for them.



Figure 4. Women shopping in a “Bum Shop.” Source: Bowman 70.



Figure 5. Assembly workers in a crinoline factory. Source: Polansky.



Figure 6. Woman being set aflame in a crinoline. Source: Wellcome Collection.



Figure 7. A woman wearing a crinoline floating in the ocean. Source: Davies.



Pockets were completely separate from any garment and reached via discreet openings in the side of a woman's skirts and petticoats.
 (Photograph Tessa Hallmann)

Figure 8. Embroidered pockets tied on a mannequin. Source: Bowman 65.

CHAPTER 3

INFLUENCES

Prior to 1870, various types of silhouette-altering underpinnings were worn to change the natural shape of the female body into a fabricated, structural work of walking art. There were multiple variations on the underpinnings in structure and materials, but they all share one objective: a concentration of volume at the curve of the back. The crinoline altered the way people interacted with one another, how women perceived themselves, and these women's relationship to furniture. This paradigm shift led to the invention of various odd-looking chairs and structures.

CRINOLINE FURNITURE

Crinolines were a major factor in the invention of the Contemporary Crinoline furniture style, the fainting couch, and the bathing machine. The fashion at the time would begin to dictate the design of furniture. For instance:

... the farthingale chair was created. This was an armless chair with a wide seat covered by high-quality fabric, fitted with a cushion and a backrest with an upholstered panel. Able to accommodate a woman's wide skirt, it was one of the earliest comfortable upholstered seats introduced as a lady's chair in the late sixteenth century, though not named until much later in the 19th century. In earlier English name was 'imbrauder's chair' or 'upholsterer's chair.' (Bowman 37)

This was the style of chair I used to create works for *Crinolinum*; my creations were a large, upholstered version of a dining room chair seen today (see Figure 9). The back upholstery of a typical Farthingale would cover the whole panel, while the frame would also be covered, usually with elaborate fabrics. Despite the extraordinary maneuvering this would require, this style of chair was also used for crinolines and bustles, leading one to wonder how a woman would control the metal rings in her favor:

I have heard time and again that men wonder how women managed to sit down wearing a bustle. The secret is that when a bustle decked woman sits down she does so carefully and does so sideways. There is a pretty little trick in it. She pretends she is going to sit on the right side of the chair and makes her first movement in that direction; but just as she reaches the chair she moves gracefully to the other side, the bustle rolls to the right completely out of the way of the sitter in the problem is solved. (Bowman 108)

This spectacular garment was viewed as “micro-architecture”, inspiring a furniture style called “crinoline furniture”. The crinoline chair, specifically, was based on the number and size of the rings and overall shape of the crinoline (see Figure 10). These chairs were romantic, elegant, and very delicate, in sharp contrast to the difficult reality of sitting while wearing a crinoline.

Another piece of furniture that was popular in the Victorian era was the fainting couch (see Figure 11), also referred to as a chaise longue, open at the end and with only a single basket to lean on. Mostly used by the upper class, these couches were typically positioned in a dedicated fainting room. They served as a place for women to rest, since Victorian women experienced regular fainting spells. The main culprit was the corset, which was often worn extremely tight, altering the shape of the body. According to studies, “wearing corsets during the Victorian era disrupted the natural lung capacity from 2% to 29%. This resulted in short breaths that can be initially eased through rest and relaxation” (Steele 23). The fainting couch was a place to rest and recover while experiencing a fainting spell from daily life or social activity. Experiencing symptoms of fainting as a woman was considered “lady-like,” since that meant the woman was fragile and meek. Often women would not wear a corset since the crinoline gave the impression of a small waist, but fake fainting was still exhibited to adhere to societal standards. Another common theory for fainting couches was that they were used while “treating” female hysteria wherein a doctor or midwife would perform a pelvic massage to the point of hysterical paroxysm. These fainting rooms allowed for comfort and privacy during massage sessions.

Bathing machines were a modest carriage used at the time for privacy while entering the ocean (see Figures 12 and 13), making it a necessity when the genders began swimming together. Prior to this, there were separate beaches for men and women to swim in the nude. Even though they were still wearing a long dress that covered their whole body, to allow women privacy, a bathing machine would be drawn into the sea by horse and would allow

them to discreetly go into the water without being seen. A great description of the use of a bathing machine is as follows:

...the bathing machines are ranged along the beach, with all their proper utensils and attendants. You have never seen one of these machines. Imagine to yourself, a small, snug, wooden chamber, fixed upon a wheel-carriage, having a door at each end, and on each side a little window above, a bench below. The bather, ascending into this apartment by wooden steps, shuts himself in, and begins to undress, while the attendant yokes a horse to the end next the sea, and draws the carriage forwards, till the surface of the water is on a level with the floor of the dressing-room, then he moves and fixes the horse to the other end. The person within, being stripped, opens the door to' the sea-ward, where he finds the guide ready, and plunges headlong into the water. After having bathed, he re-ascends into the apartment, by the steps which had been shifted for that purpose, and puts on his clothes at his leisure, while the carriage is drawn back again upon the dry land; so that he has nothing further to do, but to open the door, and come down as he went up. Should he be so weak or ill as to require a servant to put off and on his clothes, there is room enough in the apartment for half a dozen people. The guides who attend the ladies in the water are of their own sex, and they and the female bathers have a dress of flannel for the sea: nay, they are provided with other conveniences for the support of decorum. A certain number of the machines are fitted with tilts, that project from the sea-ward ends of them, so as to screen the bathers from the view of all persons whatsoever. (Smollett 12)

The guides were called dippers and they were the same gender as the bathers they attended. Their job was to assist the bather in and out of the water. The dippers were comically rough as their job was to make the seemingly leisure swim more exciting. Figure 14 is a comic of a woman wearing a self-bathing crinoline, with text that reads "a hint for the sea side—no bathing machine required." Although completely unsafe and unrealistic, this absurd idea would give women the utmost protection of their privacy.



Figure 9. Example of a farthingale chair. Source: The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica.



Figure 10. An armchair designed from a crinoline. Source: Urquiola.



Figure 11. A woman lounging in a fainting couch. Source: Gernsheim 138.



Figure 12. An illustration of bathers using a bathing machine and being thrown into the water by a professional “dipper.” Source: “Sea-Side Etiquette.”



Figure 13. A group of women dressed in day clothes, ready to use a bathing machine. Source: Nybergh.



A HINT FOR THE SEA-SIDE.—NO BATHING-MACHINE REQUIRED.
Figure 14. A cartoon of women bathing in their crinoline. Source: Leech.

SHRILL HUNGER

The writings of Roxane Gay and Lindy West have resonated with me in a personal way. They eloquently wrote about a woman's place and the contradictions that come with not fitting in the mold. Like the Victorian days, women are still taught:

...that we should be slender and small. We should not take up space. We should be seen and not heard, and if we are seen, we should be pleasing to men, acceptable to society. And most women know this, that we are supposed to disappear, but it's something that needs to be said, loudly, over and over again, so that we can resist surrendering to what is expected of us. (Gay, *Hunger* 13)

The resistance has come in waves and it is now ever so strong, but Gay poses a critical question: "What does it say about our culture that the desire for weight loss is considered a default feature of womanhood?" (*Hunger* 137). Gay asks this not expecting a direct answer because there isn't a simple answer. She elaborates: "As a woman, as a fat woman, I am not supposed to take up space. And yet, as a feminist, I am encouraged to believe I can take up space. I live in a contradictory space where I should try to take up space but not too much of it, and not in the wrong way, where the wrong way is any way where my body is concerned" (*Hunger* 171). Taking up physical space was customary for Victorian women, yet they had to be modest and quiet about their opinions, rendering them invisible. These contradictions led to confusion that is still happening today. Women who take up too much space are criticized constantly for doing so; in *Shrill*, West writes about her own body:

As a woman, my body is scrutinized, policed, and treated as a public commodity. As a fat woman, my body is also lampooned, openly reviled, and associated with moral and intellectual failure. My body limits my job prospects, access to medical care and fair trials, and – the one thing Hollywood movies and Internet trolls most agree on – my ability to be loved. So the subtext, when a thin person asks a fat person, 'Where do you get your confidence?' is, 'You must be some sort of alien because if I looked like you, I would definitely throw myself into the sea. (67-68)

In sharp contrast to when the fashion was to pretend to be fat and to wear cages that limited your every movement, this *real* fat body into today's society is limiting in terms of job prospects, respectable medical care, and the opinions of the public. West adds, "I am my body. When my body gets smaller, it is still me. When my body gets bigger, it is still me. There is not a thin woman inside me, awaiting excavation. I am one piece" (15). This idea that there is a thin woman inside me is devaluing and belittling. The size of a person does not equate value or grant others the right to mock us in any way. "Denying people access to

value is an incredibly insidious form of emotional violence, one that our culture wields aggressively and liberally to keep marginalized groups small and quiet” (West 76). I experience this first hand on a daily basis, as do millions of others. Women are being told that they are crazy if they don’t fit the mold or check enough boxes, but as Roxane Gay says, “Honey, you’re not crazy. You’re a woman” (*Difficult Women* 41)

TEXTILES AND FASHION

Fashion trends for women have shown that comfort and beauty often have little in common. Crinolines came into existence as a solution for heavy clothing and to give women a voluptuous form; however, this desire for exaggerated physical alteration came at the cost of being a victim. It wasn’t until the 1920’s when the Victorian-era prudishness began to unravel and hemlines began to rise. Women rebelled by defying the law and began wearing trousers:

The designers, the haute couture fashion houses and the ever changing seasons – they all have a high influence on fashion. But have you ever considered the historical impact on style trends? According to the 1927 Hemline Index, the length of our ancestors’ skirt or dress could actually indicate a country’s wealth, prosperity and general wellbeing of the time...For hundreds or even thousands of years, women’s skirts and dresses conformed to one length: long and down to the floor... (Koo-Seen-Lin)

There was a code of etiquette that must be followed and lived by to be a “proper lady” in the Victorian era. There was a specific type of dress for each activity done during the day, and they were often re-worn during the week since clothing was handmade and expensive. In “The Etiquette of Victorian Dress,” Harris explains:

There's no doubt about it, Victorian women wore a lot of clothes. There’s also no doubt that Victorians had specific rules—a code of etiquette—for what sort of clothing could and should be worn for every occasion. This was often trying to purse and patience, but every woman who had any hope of being considered a “lady” lived by the etiquette of dress. Much of this etiquette was passed by word of mouth, but books also gave specific rules for dressing, as did fashion magazines. So whether a lady was preparing for an evening at the opera, a shopping spree, or a quiet vacation, there was little doubt as to what sort of clothing she ought to wear.

Furthermore, Harris recounts the experience of a Victorian woman who explains much of women’s time was spent changing outfits:

You came down to breakfast ready for church in your ‘best dress’...After church you went into tweeds. You always changed again before tea, into a ‘tea-gown’ if you possessed that special creation; the less affluent wore a summer day-frock. However small your dress allowance, a different dinner dress for each night was considered necessary. Thus a Friday to Monday party meant taking your ‘Sunday Best,’ two tweed coats and skirts with appropriate shirts, three evening frocks, three garments suitable for tea, your ‘best hat’...a variety of country hats and caps, as likely as not a riding-habit...rows of indoor and outdoor shoes, boots and gaiters, numberless accessories in the way of petticoats, shawls, scarves, ornamental combs...All this necessitated at least one huge domed trunk, called a ‘Noah’s Ark,’ an immense hat-box and a heavy dressing case.

For breakfast, a woman would not wear what she slept in: she wore a dress called a “wrapper” that fit the body loosely, allowing her to appear neat first thing in the morning. “Yet as soon as breakfast was over, it was time to change outfits again, for, as The Ladies’ Book of Etiquette, Fashion, and Manual of Politeness reported, ‘a lady should never receive morning callers in a wrapper’” (Harris). This means that a woman has worn three different outfits before even leaving the house.

MATERIALS AND STRUCTURES

Underpinnings were often made of coiled steel spring, whalebone, wicker, and woven mesh that went around the body, overlapping with stiff rows of horsehair. The bustle cushion, or bumroll, was the most accessible and would have been worn by all classes as it was very simple to manufacture (see Figure 15). The pad was commonly a semi-circular shape but could also be square or oval, which would be filled with natural materials such as cotton batting, horsehair, feathers, or wool and then would be tied firmly around the waist. Alterations with lace trim, ruffles, or pleats were commonly added, and there were often multiple pads stacking on top of one another in decreasing size to the top to add volume:

While in 1867 horsehair petticoats, gored, and sewn into an elastic waistband, were often substituted for it, yet the crinoline in a small size was not wholly discarded for several years. Frequently it was not more than a few Hoops suspended by bands from the waist, open in the front and used to support the bustle. By 1869, hooped only at the back, this became the crinolette of steel half hoops with horsehair or crinoline flounces forming a bustle. (Willett and Cunnington 179)

The transition of materials and forms was fast and ever-changing. This fashion trend was referred to as *Crinolinomania*, or the fashion obsession with the crinoline. Since the

crinoline and pannier gave women enough volume to display decorative tapestries, they became a work of art. In addition, “an absolute necessity for this Victorian style of dress was a well-fitting bustle [which] soon became an indispensable accessory to a lady's costume. The bustle was a device to expand the skirt of the dress below the waist” (“Victorian Bustle”). While this type of underpinning didn’t give much volume to display decorative art, it “...add[ed] back fullness to the hard-edged front lines of the 1880s silhouette. The various styles of bustles were made with wires, springs, mohair padding and fabric, appearing both archaic and torturous. But, although the [bustle] was suitable for a walking dress, it was not always sufficient to maintain the voluminous trained skirt of an evening dress” (“Victorian Bustle”). There was no simple way around it: being a lady came with hard work.

A Braided Wire Bustle
FOR 25 Cents.

Patented—Aug. 25, 1880,
Jan. 15, 1886.

No. 2
OR
TWO ROW.
35 Cents.



Patented—Aug. 25, 1880,
Jan. 15, 1886.

No. 3
OR
THREE ROW.
ONLY 45 Cents.



WESTON & WELLS' HEALTH BRAIDED WIRE BUSTLES.
Great Reduction in Price. Improved Quality.

In order to supply the constantly increasing demand for our Goods in England, France and the United States, we have lately become interested in the manufacture of the fine tempered steel wire of which our bustles are made. This enables us to offer the goods at the following reduced prices. Quality guaranteed equal to any ever manufactured by us. These goods are covered with hard enamel, which prevents their rusting in any climate or at the seashore. The tapes on all our bustles are now secured at the ends by metal fastenings, which prevent them from coming loose, even when exposed to severe usage.

No. 1 or one Row.....	25c.	"A" White Wire.....	35c.
No. 2 or two Row, large.....	35c.	Black, two Row, White Wire.....	35c.
No. 3 or three Row, large.....	45c.	Black, three Row, White Wire.....	45c.
No. 4 or four Row, extra large.....	55c.	Lady Washington Tension One Row.....	55c.
No. 5 or five Row, full dress.....	75c.	Paris High Drapery.....	75c.
Misses' Clingereid, White Wire.....	40c.	French Form, Lace Covered.....	75c.
Mixed Braided Wire Hair Bolls.....	15c.		

Any of these articles SENT BY MAIL, postpaid, on receipt of price, if you do not find them at stores. Price lists and terms to dealers on application. (Mention this paper.)

The Weston & Wells Manufacturing Co., 1017 Chestnut St., Philadelphia.

Figure 15. An ad for a bustle.
Source: “Victorian Bustle”.

CRAFT

In *Why We Make Things and Why It Matters*, Peter Korn explores various steps in his life and the rewards of creative practice: “Once it enters the world, an object gathers history and associations on its own” (65). I appreciate his view on objects as having external

meaning and his description of the care that goes into a project as being a slow and thoughtful process. The history of craft is important to my process from start to finish since materials and methods for creating each piece take on different techniques and fabrication methods. Korn recalls the process and creation of a frame-and-panel cabinet door, commenting:

In furniture making, beginnings are critical. For a simple frame-and-panel cabinet door to stay flat over the Long Haul, and not become too tight in the summer or overly gapped in winter, success starts with the choice of Timber. Not just what species or which plank, but also from which part of the board once saws the stiles and rails, how dry the wood is, the method by which it was dried, and how it was stored and handled. All this before the actual work of milling the timber flat and Square, laying out and cutting the joinery, making and fitting the panel, assembling, trimming, fitting, hinging, latching, I'm finishing. Throughout the entire process, the quality achievable at each stage is utterly dependent on the care with which the Craftsman has accomplished every previous step. (29)

Each step in the process is contingent on the success of the previous step and using the right materials for each piece, whether for structural or conceptual purposes. Acknowledging that some individuals are innately gifted, Korn comments that's not a reason to disregard the pleasure of craft and design through learning and practice:

I often meet people who think that the ability to design is beyond their reach, a mythical gift bestowed on others. Yet over Decades of teaching I have seen that design is a skill like any other. As with sharpening a chisel or handling a drawknife, anyone can improve through education, practice, and reflection. To be sure, some individuals are more innately gifted at design than others, just as some are more innately musical or athletic. But there is no reason why the rest of us should not also enjoy the trials and rewards of creative engagement with reasonable success and genuine pleasure, and perhaps an occasional Flash of serendipitous brilliance. (113)

For craft to be successful, it must go unnoticed or appear hidden. The work doesn't give away the answers at first glance but instead makes the viewer stay, searching for the answers. The concept of craft and its concerns with form, material choice, and context play an important role in the making of *Crinolinum*, whether it goes unnoticed or not.

CHAPTER 4

MFA THESIS EXHIBITION: CRINOLINUM

My MFA thesis exhibition, *Crinolinum*, is an accumulation of sculptural work based on the progression of historical garments and their relationship to furniture. The show was exhibited at the University Gallery at San Diego State University's School of Art + Design from November 26th through December 6th, 2018. The exhibition shows an evolution of work that I broke down into four sections, each referencing different thought processes, materials, and methods.

FROM: CHAIR

These first pieces are all created from used upholstered chairs, each having unique qualities. The series *From: Chair* (Plates 1, 2, and 3) is constructed of upholstery materials, wooden chair arms, and horse hair. For this work, I wanted to highlight the importance of materials over function. Horse hair was a main textile used to stiffen crinolines before metal and wooden hoops were introduced, and it was also a great stuffing material for upholstered furniture. Here, I wove strands of horsehair through the thick fabric similar to how it was done in the past, referencing the historical use of these materials. I see underpinnings as a sort of armor to the body, acting as a barrier between the world and the wearer. While holding that idea, I transformed these materials into decorative wall pieces, they are hung from metal clothing hangers, being put on display just as women are daily.

In this section, *14 Pounds; Layers of Cloth* (Plates 4 and 5) has two works made from chair legs that are bolted together with layers upon layers of upholstery fabric. The chair legs, placed together, are a stand in for the female body, where the fabric represents the large weight a woman would carry around to get the desired shape. Fourteen pounds was the average weight of clothing in the 1800's; before the use of underpinnings, women would wear up to seventeen layers of petticoats to obtain a desired shape. The layers of fabric

Plate 1. *From: Chair*, a series of decorative wall pieces, 2018



Plate 2. Individual shots of piece one and three of the series *From: Chair*, 2018



Plate 3. Individual shots of piece two and four of the series *From: Chair*, 2018



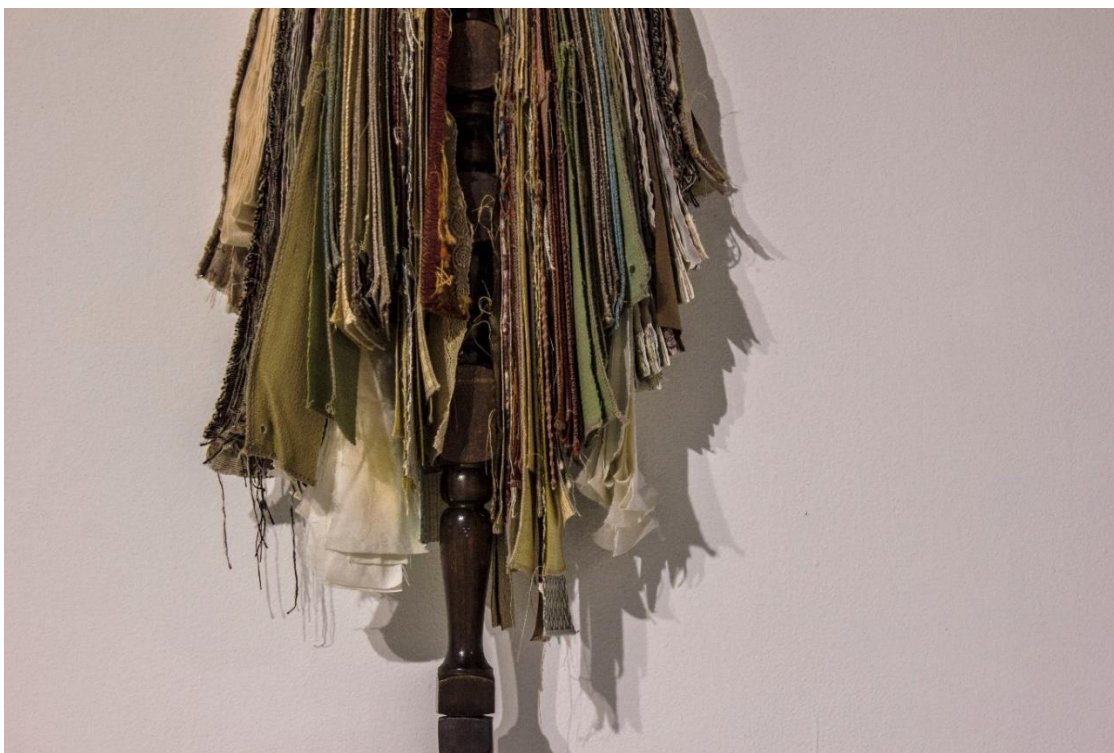
represent the weight being carried on the body, with emphasis given to the large amount of cloth hanging down on the legs to a single point. Since these works are bolted to the wall for stability so they won't fall over, it makes me think about how challenging it would have been to wear so many layers on a tiny frame.

The last piece in this section is *Chair-Deconstructed* (Plate 6), a found chair broken down to its springs and bare wood structure, and it shows the scars of nails from multiple layers of upholstery. Women would wear multiple outfits a day with gowns that were thick and upholstered, often planned and worn to match the occasion as well as the décor. Upholstered chairs used the same materials that were used in underpinnings and gowns. While wearing an underpinning, the interaction with furniture becomes limited and chairs become uncomfortable and dysfunctional, the opposite of their purpose. There was furniture designed and created for the specific function of holding women clad in a crinoline; for instance, there were large cushioned ottoman-like stools, which allowed the cage to drift side-to-side. Inspired by this, in *Chair-Deconstructed*, I've deconstructed two chairs, and reconfigured them to a size appropriate to sit in while wearing an underpinning, yet there are

Plate 4. *14 Pounds; Layers of Cloth*, a series of two works, photographed together, 2018



Plate 5. A detail image of *14 Pounds; Layers of Cloth*, 2018



wooden hoops covered in synthetic horsehair bursting out the side, signifying that if a hoop skirt wearer was to sit in the chair, they too would burst out the sides. The materials taken from these chair skeletons have been used in multiple other works in this exhibition, while existing materials like cotton, horse hair stuffing, and upholstery fabric were repurposed in these pieces.

Plate 6. *Chair-Deconstructed*, 2018



CRINIS-LINUM-HAIR-THREAD

Crinis-Linum-Hair-Thread (Plate 7) concerns the issue of scale, allowing the viewer to experience a life-size crinoline or hoop skirt. Stiffened dress pattern is used as a skin for the crinoline, addressing a contemporary issue of the limitations of size, while horsehair is draped around the bottom of the skirt, referencing the first material used to create a crinoline. This piece barely fits through a set of double doors, as it is so wide it has to be squeezed in order to fit through, making me think about the process of going out dressed up in a crinoline. The Crinoline hid the body shape very well as it was considered taboo to see a

woman's body. Yet, at the same time, the crinoline gave women an exaggerated shape, childbearing hips, and a large bum. It was an answer to sexualizing modesty, but at what cost? Even though the large hoops of crinolines kept those around them at a distance and allowed for the legs to breathe, women encountered danger from wearing them. As mentioned earlier, through many losses, women continued to put their life in danger for the sake of popular fashion. This piece emphasizes the impracticality of the scale that was of a wearable crinoline.

Plate 7. A full image and detailed image of *Crinis-Linum-HairThread*, 2017



The next work, *Hang Me By My Crinolette* (Plate 8), represents the overlapping of two underpinnings. These underskirts were worn under a dress specifically to give the impression of a large bottom, creating a difficult situation if the wearer wanted to sit down comfortably. For this piece, I created a wooden structure utilizing the shapes of a crinolette and a bustle. To simulate the structural form, I fastened copper rivets and copper nails on large bent laminated wood; the piece also hangs from large ropes, replicating the idea of being dropped down onto the potential wearer. The dramatic shadows allow the viewer to become a part of the piece, imagining themselves being caged.

Plate 8. A full and detailed image of *Hang Me By My Crinolette*, 2017



The last piece in this section, *Pannier Basket* (Plate 9), is a wearable garment displayed on a mannequin. A pannier is defined as an underskirt that “took its name from the French [word] for ‘basket.’ This could either be a huge full-Petticoat Contraption which set its wearer out into the world like a galleon in Full Sail, or shorter ‘side-panniers’ which sat over each hip and were marginally more comfortable but had a woman resemble a pack horse” (Bowman 67). These baskets became a beast of burden for the wearer. I wanted to create a piece that allowed the wearer to experience the discomfort and burden first hand, by tying the piece around their waist and forcing the hands to the front. A pannier is a traditional underpinning that is essentially two baskets on string tied around the waist, each resting on a hip. This gave the wearer no easy place to rest arms and hands, while also making doorways a challenging obstacle since they could be up to six feet wide for formal occasions.

Plate 9. Image of *Pannier Basket* on a green velvet mannequin, 2017



HAIR FRONDS

Organic shapes are commonly associated with the female form, so for this series I make reference to seed pods and palm leaves for inspiration. Using dried fronds from palm trees and long strands of horse hair, *Hair Fronds* (Plate 10) showcases the forgotten history of the materials. The palm fronds mimic the façade of underpinnings on the female form, being surrounded by horse hair as support, which historically gave the structure strength and durability. Hair is part of what defines a woman's beauty, and when it is taken away, the context changes drastically. What was once growing and bringing warmth, is now cut, homeless, and sense of uncanny.

Plate 10. A full and detailed image of *Hair Fronds* in dramatic lighting, 2018



Hidden Underneath (Plates 11 and 12) is a group of three works made from dried palm fronds and natural materials used in upholstered furniture such as cotton, wool, and horsehair. Behind the fibers is gilding, imbuing the understated fibers with significance as well as vibrancy. When sitting on a piece of upholstered furniture, we don't often think about what exactly it took to create the work or what lies underneath the fabric. These unseen processes and areas are often messy and raw, sat on for years and forgotten about. Beauty often goes unseen, in the creation of objects, in the details, and especially in the individuality of others. These pieces aim to show value and importance to what is unseen and hidden underneath.

Pannier That Confines (Plates 13 and 14) combines structural material based off the form of a pannier with a natural organic shape. The wooden forms are steam bent to fit the dried palm frond, with natural raw wool lining the cavity. The feminine form of the palm frond alludes to women's close relationship to the materials that represent historical clothing forms and the fibers used to create them. The inside of the palm frond is treated with multiple layers of clear finish, making the texture appear oily. These treatments add a grotesque flesh-like feeling to the work.

Plate 11. Series of 3 palm fronds titled *Hidden Underneath*, 2018



Plate 12. Close up images of *Hidden Underneath*, 2018



Plate 13. *Pannier that Confines* in installation view, 2018



Plate 14. Detail view of *Pannier that Confines*, 2018



BUMROLL PLEASE

The series *Bumroll Please* (Plates 15-19) consists of six bumrolls formed from wire mesh and stuffed with various materials. Each piece is hanging from a metal and wooden hanger and lined with lace. Starting in order from the leftmost piece in Plate 15, the materials used are: silicone, stuffing such as toilet paper and cotton covered in panty hose, and the last contains handmade potpourri. The next set in Plate 16 starting from the left consists of various makeup/beauty products, cotton, fake fingernails, curlers, and hair. A bumroll was the most commonly worn underpinning hundreds of years ago, no matter what age or class; it was worn on a daily basis, often paired with many petticoats. Items in *Bumroll Please* used as stuffing inside the wire mesh address contemporary issues of compression of the body to fit into societal standards. Beauty is often forced and faked to fit these standards creating not only physical damage to the wearer, but also mental and psychological damage. The weight of excessive garments, compression of latex to specific body parts, and toxicity of chemicals hurt the body over time all in the name of beauty.

Plate 15. *Bumroll Please*, installation view one, 2017



Plate 16. *Bumroll Please*, installation view two, 2017



Plate 17. *Bumroll Please*, detail view of potpourri and panty hose, 2017



Plate 18. *Bumroll Please*, detail view of silicone and hair, 2017



Plate 19. *Bumroll Please*, detail view of nails and makeup, 2017



CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Inspired by historical forms and materials, *Crinolinum* explores boundaries between forced beauty and the grotesque, or the strange and uncanny forms woman transformed into for fashion's sake. My concerns intersect the studies of woodworking, furniture design, fashion, sculpture, and women's studies, making me think about connections between these fields and how they all examine the historical importance of body transformation. By researching the vast issues of beauty that women dealt with in the past and the extremes they went through to fit into societal norms, I have come to understand how these concerns are still relevant today in light of contemporary movements that challenge beauty standards and advocate body positivity. By making and exhibiting this work I hope to expand awareness of the complex sociopolitical layers below the surface of fashion, encourage discussion of body politics, and challenge normative representations of beauty.

EXHIBITION IMAGES

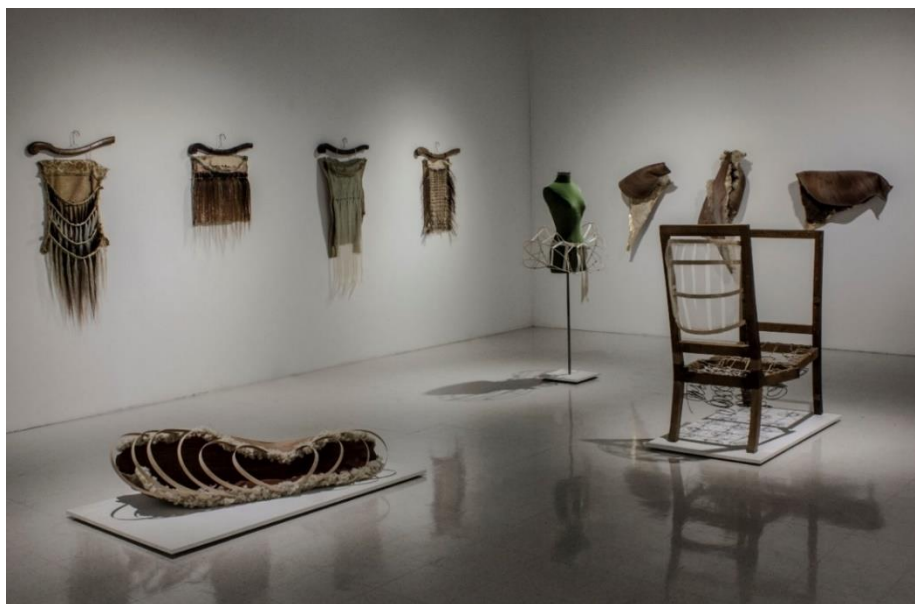
Plate 20. Installation view #1 of *Crinolinum*, 2018Plate 21. Installation view #2 of *Crinolinum*, 2018

Plate 22. Installation view #3 of *Crinolinum*, 2018



Plate 23. Installation view #4 of *Crinolinum*, 2018



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