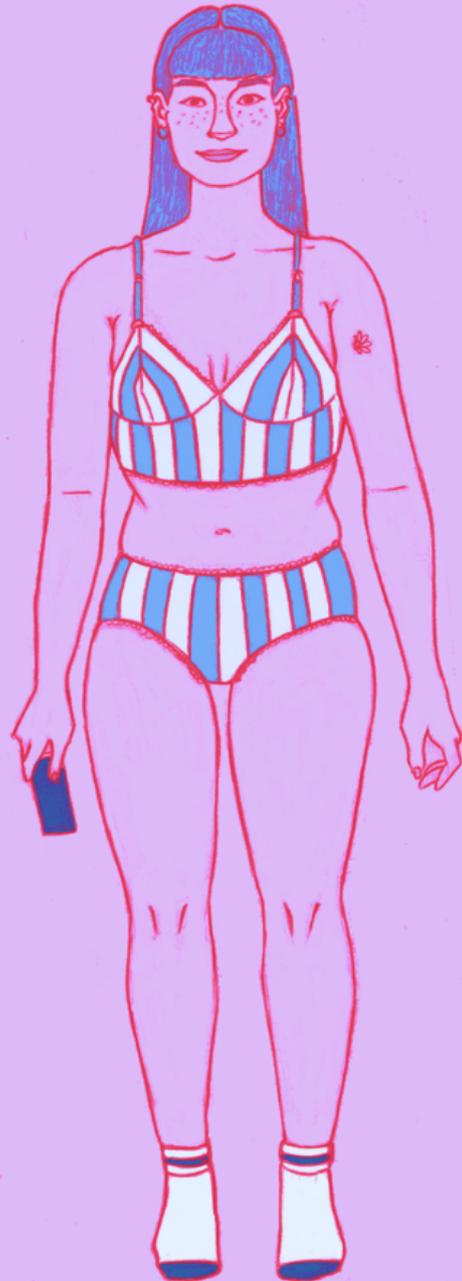
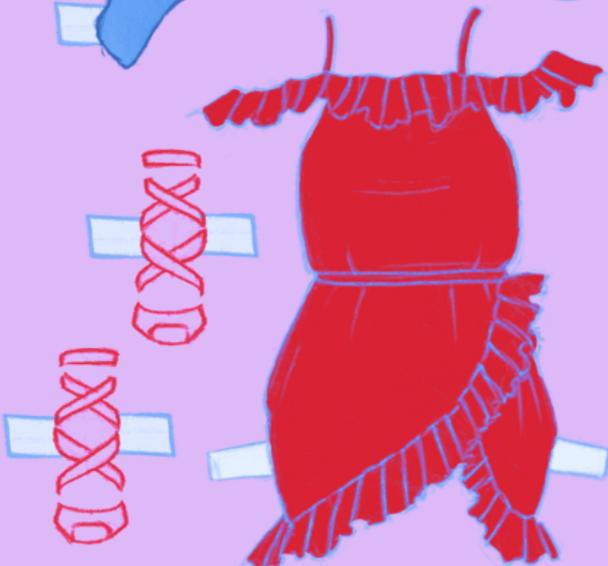
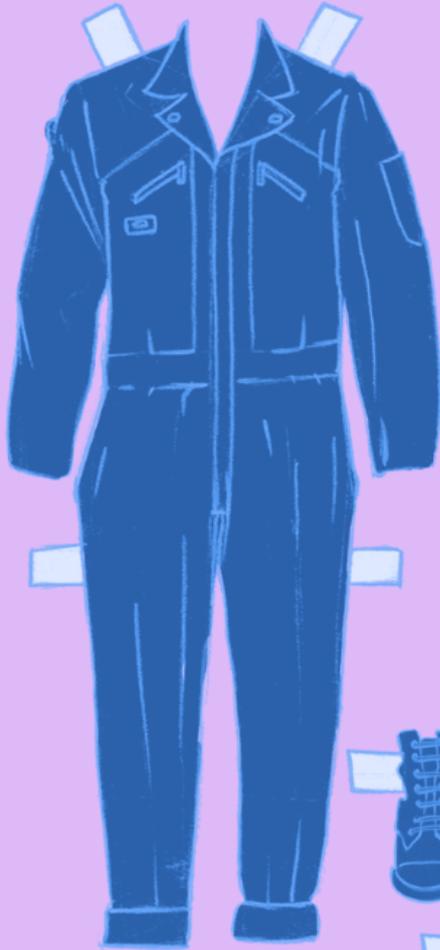


SKIRTING AROUND

ONE SIZE
DOES NOT FIT ALL



APRIL '21
ONE

A note from the editor

Welcome to the first issue of **Skirting Around!**

What on *earth* was I thinking when I decided to launch a literary magazine about women's clothing in the middle of a pandemic? It's been at least a year since we put anything other than matching sweatshirts and jogging bottoms in our online shopping basket, we go to Zoom meetings in our pyjamas, our fringes are homemade and that little black dress we bought has lost track of how many parties it's not been invited to.

But **Skirting Around** was never going to be 'just' about our love or hate of clothes: it was always determined to delve into all those 'other things' that come attached to them; body image, sexual harassment, human rights, self-esteem and, well, the list is long. Why *does* women's clothing continue to be so politically charged, so susceptible to social scrutiny, and still leave its wearers so open to abuse?

In a time when we seem to be more defined (and divided) than ever by our labels and categories – whether thrust upon us, or hand-picked – the submissions that came pouring in gave me a renewed sense of the power of words to help us reconnect, both with ourselves *and* with others.

Bold, brave and uncompromising, these writers – young, old, new and established – shared intimate truths, moments of epiphany, wild untethered imaginings. They took the blank page and brought their stories, both real and imagined, to life. The good, the bad, the ugly, the beautiful, the surreal – all given free rein to say what needed to be said.

They recollected the fabrics, dresses, jackets, cardigans and shoes from their past – the hand-made clothes and hand-me-downs, the favourite outfits and the faux pas. They chose their own fashion rules, unafraid to bend and break them and make them their own. And they looked the male gaze unflinchingly in the eye, and wore whatever damn length of skirt or trousers they wanted.

It was such a pleasure to bring these writers together to create this wonderfully passionate and defiant chorus that fills each and every page of our first issue. A huge thank you to everyone who contributed so generously of their time, and for trusting **Skirting Around** with their work, to Megan for turning my vague ideas and stick figure drawings into such a fabulous cover illustration, and to my invaluable editorial assistant Alison for her painstaking attention to detail, and her endurance of many, many Zoomathons.

As you'll soon discover – well I'm sure you already knew – one size does not fit all.

Carolyn

Skirting Around

ONE

April 2021

Editor in Chief: Carolyn Hashimoto
Editorial Assistant: Alison Gray

www.skirtingaround.org

Twitter: @skirting_around
Email: skirting.around@yahoo.com

Front cover illustration by Megan Park
www.meganparkillustration.com
[@meganparkillustration](https://www.instagram.com/meganparkillustration)

SKIRTING AROUND / ONE

Please note *Skirting Around* contains writing that deals with issues of consent and assault, and is not suitable reading material for children.

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Sarah Smith

Cute Coordinates for the Modern Miss

I'll let you into a secret. If you're cutting out the dress-up doll on the back page of your comic, put in the requisite time and effort. PREPARATION IS KEY. This week's playmate, and her capsule wardrobe, aren't built to last. You need to be very careful.

Find a decent pair of scissors. The round-ended, primary-school type are neither use nor ornament. Similarly, avoid any lurking in the cutlery drawer, they are invariably rusty or covered in bacon grease. Try to locate a pair of hairdressing or sewing scissors. ESCHEW PINKING SHEARS.

Arrange all your materials on a clean, flat surface. If you cut through her good tablecloth, your mum will leather you, so be warned. TAKE YOUR TIME. I cannot stress this enough. The thick, black lines are there for a reason, cut along them and snip all tabs neatly. Gird your loins if accessories such as handbags and scarves or (God forbid!) jewellery are featured.

Once you've got your paper pal and this issue's outfits cut out, the world's your mussel. It's time to fit the clothes to the figure. *Help Bunty Make Up Her Mind Which Of These Super Get-Ups She Should Choose!* Whether it's summer playsuits and sunglasses for a day at the beach, or warm coats and boots for winter walks – YOU MAKE THE DECISIONS.

Denise Zygadlo

Homage to kept cloth



NEW LIFE: This image is of a paper doll stand of my Auntie Maureen wearing her honeymoon dress - the original dress lies at her feet. (*card, pencil, gouache*)

'It gives me great pleasure to keep my clothes, my dresses, my stockings. I have never thrown away a pair of shoes of mine in 20 years.

I cannot separate myself from my clothes nor Alain's – the pretext is that they are still good – it is my past and as rotten as it was I would like to take it and hold it tightly in my arms.'

Louise Bourgeois 1968

It is my past. Clothes as our second skin are the closest to us, as a loved one is, as anything can be. From the moment we are first wrapped or swaddled, to our last windings on our final journey. Just as a smell can evoke so clearly a memory of a place or person, so can an item of clothing or a piece of cloth bring back to life a past experience.

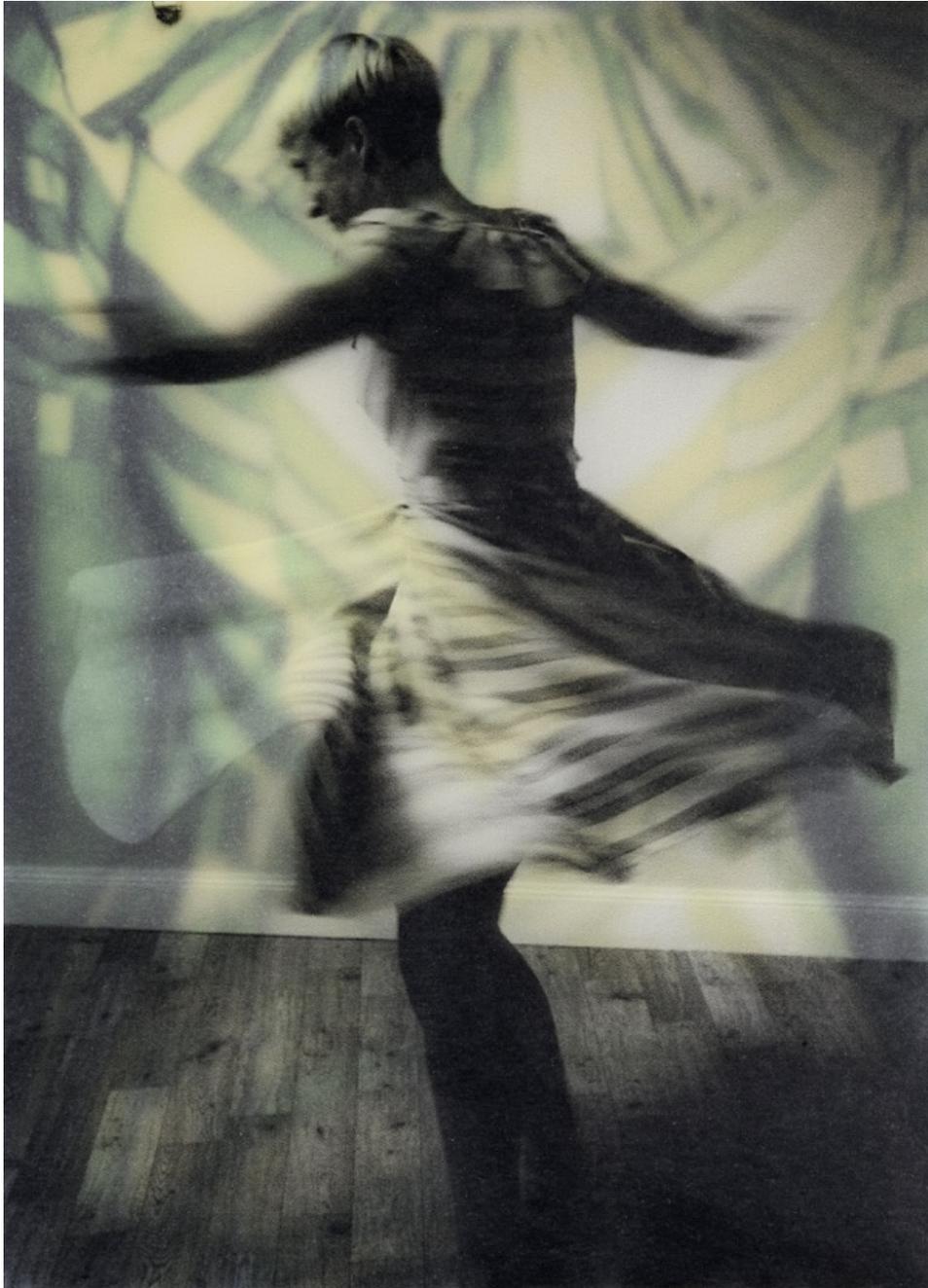


HONEYMOON DANCE... Collage of the honeymoon dress. (*photocopied images/gouache*)

I became aware of the importance of the tactile qualities of cloth when I came across my first book as a child. Looking at the illustrations, I was so familiar with the images but not just visually.

I remembered the smoothness to the touch of Old King Cole's hose and the soft, satin plumpness of the quilt on a kitten's bed. As a small child I had the sensual experience of touch through looking and imagining. This way of remembering I found mystifying, then I

realised I am continuously drawn to feel the quality of a piece of clothing on a shop rail, a roll of cloth in a fabric shop, or any other cloth just in passing; it is the sense of touch that is important to me and that feeds my imagination.



TWIRL: My friend Alison twirling in the honeymoon dress. (*Photo layers /tracing paper*)

The skills of our grandparents – dressmaking, pattern cutting, lacemaking, mending – have become a thing of the past. Knitting and crochet, once familiar to most women and girls, have almost become a novelty craft.

The exotic names – Georgette, Chiffon, Crêpe de Chine etc. – have little meaning for people no longer handling and working with them on a regular basis.

I can hear my grandmother, who was a milliner, enthusing over Moygashel; my mother claiming her suit was made from Baratheia. My first ballet tunic was Piqué; evening dresses would be made from Taffeta, Organza, Devoré – delicious, evocative words.

Our throwaway culture has given permission for fashion to change at increasing speed with the emphasis on current new trends. Those of us who grew up in the post-war years – when our clothes were lengthened, altered and passed on – learnt how to use a pattern in domestic science classes, how to pin darts, set in a zip and ease a gathered shoulder. Making clothes gives us an understanding of cloth – the way it hangs and moves, the weave and the nap, the best fabric for a particular use.

Clothes lasted for as long as they would fit or went into holes and then there was always darning. Mending is now becoming a respected art – hooray!

Over the past few years I have collected quotes from friends regarding their personal associations with cloth and the variety of meaning and nostalgia it can provide.

This has inspired me to look at my own kept cloth – there is plenty – and re-experience my own connections, bringing them into the present through a series of art works.

Meagan Jennett

Midriff

And on the sixth day, G-d plucked a dandelion from the long grass and blew on its blowsy towhead, saying: 'Let these delicate seeds sprout into all the little girls of this wide world I have created. Let them dance and sway and bow their heads. And because men must have something to eat, let these flowers grow a field, a body, a core[pse], to be plowed and sewn, to be battled over, to be bled and harvested.'

And so it was. And G-d told the girls all was Good, and they believed H-m.

And so, like a flower, I grew. And there, in the middle of me, one summer sprouted something called a *midriff*. And I did not know what it was, only that it felt exposed and the part of me that bubbled laughter was suddenly shameful.

I covered it with my arms, but I was a dandelion and destined to grow.

So unwillingly I stretched up
to the burning sun
and I flushed
with the heat of
this sinful flesh belly
too long to be covered
this new waist that was a word I didn't understand

[*sexy*]

[which meant, I gathered, long hair and bare *midriffs*, and was bad]

and I could not hide
no matter how I spun my arms tight
or slumped my shoulders
or made myself small
my shirt would not stay tucked in.

So, Mom bought me boy's shirts, to swallow the field of my deceitful *midriff*. And boy's shorts, that I asked for because suddenly my legs had sprouted too, long like beanstalks in summer, and I felt eyes sliding up them while my palms slid down, praying to G-d that my fingertips were short enough that they wouldn't

hang

below

the hemline

or else I'd be sent to detention, like the girls we all knew were sluts

[who were eating lunch alone in the library, so no one would see them crying]

I became a box. A box who had a *box* — I didn't know why the boys guffawed when they said that, when they called to one another on long lunch hours, laughing and stripping off shirts as they spilled onto the sizzling car park that was our playground. From under the tent of my clothes, I watched them and wondered: was Joshua gleaming and slick with sweat when he marched around Jericho? Was David's body so lithe, his skin so tawny, from days lying in the sun? When he threw the stone that killed Goliath, did he grunt like they did as they passed the worn football back and forth between them? They were bold smiles and musky sweat, easy muscles bending and I was jealous, and—

—I was a battlefield blossoming and on brave days I

unbuttoned

the top button of my

[*oversized*]

[*undersexed*]

boy's polo shirt

and felt a language on my skin

that I couldn't quite speak yet

but understood that one day I would

and sometimes

[on very brave days]

I wore choker necklaces

to say, 'Here I am,

here is my pale throat

like the one we read about in the Song of Songs

that our teacher says was G-d's love for H-s people

nothing more than that

[nothing *sexy*]

But we smelled the tang underneath the ancient words
and knew the mystery of it all was just
beyond reach of our sticky

[*sinful*]

fingertips.

And maybe it's a dare, the unbuttoning. Like sliding fingers through flame. Like ankles on Victorian ladies, and napes of necks on geishas, and eyes behind billowing Bedouin veils.

Maybe I want

[will only admit it in darkest night]

to slip pointed tongue through red lips and say, 'Yes, I *am* Eve. Her daddy rejected her and my daddy left me, and here is my body if you want it. Take it. It is worthless. It is only a *box*.'

And in the mornings before school, I rolled glitter on my collarbone, into the soft dimple at the base of my throat, thinking: 'Here is my flesh. Look at me.'

And then I buttoned my collar up.

Unless I was feeling like a slut—

—in which case I left that stiff cotton billowing open

just enough

for them to see me sparkle.

Kate Noakes

Asthma is dressed stone, rasping

Every day she rolls away her wardrobe doors
and stands before them – the stone dresses –
listening for the one singing the loudest, *me*.

Some days flint clinks a knap song.
Sometimes granite hums a three-part crystal.

Sandstone choruses itself back to the beach,
an hourglass broken on the striped carpet.

One special day, a whole chalk downland
hymned her a dusty covering.

Monthly, mudstone gurgles and boils
to help her navigate the tide.

Warmer than marble – the stone dresses – and
changeable by the drugs of fire and ice:
nothing can split them, not hammer, not chisel.

Florence Campbell-Gray

Tights

Despite the best efforts: There is a body
the uncanny weave of a lady
the slightness of knees
the delicacy of shame

Now scabbing smoothly with nail varnish
and darned between third and fourth toe
this is a chronology of stitching, stretching
to my past life as a fairy with pink legs
and a restlessly migrating crotch
to my best impression of Dita Von Teese
a red herringbone for a shrunk waist

But I do not feel hot

Despite the pricking fever of nylon

Tawnya Selene Renelle

On How I Started Dressing Like a Dame

This body now. I turned 36 this January. About a week before my birthday, I woke up with a less than elegant epiphany moment. No bright lights or chorus of alto voices accompanied this moment. Rather, it was a binman emptying the rubbish bins in my garden as I sat under my bedroom window with a cigarette and a cup of coffee still in my pajamas.

It was an epiphany that took 25 years to grow. 25 years of building and shaping until it arrived, fully formed and ready for me to pay attention. It would not be ignored. The epiphany was this: I need to start dressing how I feel on the inside. I need to start dressing exactly how I want, how I have always wanted, and it needs to happen now.

I have spent years screenshotting photos, bookmarking websites, and lusting over vintage-inspired items. I have envied and been awe struck by plus-size women who dress like pin-up girls. I have cried endless tears over clothes I thought I was too fat or too ugly to wear. 25 years I have spent wishing, wanting, and feeling less than myself.

It is safe to say that my obsession with vintage clothing developed when I was around the age of 9 or 10. At the time I spent most weekends with my grandmother. We would go to our local library and check out an entire stack of movies to watch. In these stacks of films I was exposed to the great female actresses of the 1930s, 40s and 50s. Greta Garbo, Judy Garland, Audrey Hepburn, Marilyn Monroe, Kathryn Hepburn, and Ethel Merman to name just a few of the women I did and still do adore. I remember with awe and reverence the way they moved, the confidence they exuded, and all the beautiful clothing they wore.

I plastered my pre-teen, and then teen, bedroom wall with their photos. My great aunt, an avid antiques collector, gifted me book after book filled with photos of my favorite Hollywood dames, gals and starlets. I would spend part of my allowance each week photocopying my favorite images from the books in order to create massive collages and altars to their worship.

It is safe to say when I learned that I 'couldn't' or 'shouldn't' dress like my idols was when I was 13 or 14. I have always been fat. I look at pictures of myself from when I was 6 or 7 and

know that it isn't the size I was 'supposed' to be. When puberty hit and my size only continued to increase, I realized that the high-waisted pants and sheer tops, the collared dresses, the tartan skirts and jumpers I adored were off limits to me. Not just off limits to me, but completely unavailable.



I let the images remain on the walls, sometimes an unhealthy reminder of the weight I obsessively tried to lose. I hid behind jeans and oversized t-shirts with bands (think The Beatles /The Doors) printed on them. Between the ages of 14–20 I convinced myself I was dressing exactly how I wanted to. Gretta and Judy, Audrey and Kathryn, began to be covered

up by ticket stubs, posters, and other punk ephemera. I was a tomboy, I was a punk, and I convinced myself that I didn't want to look feminine.

In my 20s as I began to understand myself better, I regained my love for skirts and dresses. I recognized the convincing and misinformation I had been feeding myself. I allowed floral prints, flowy items and more to work their way into my wardrobe. Yet I still never felt contented. I always felt like I was trying at something but never getting exactly where I wanted.

After my epiphany that would not be ignored, I immediately began looking through my phone. Screenshot after screenshot of outfits I loved awaited me. I looked at the bookmarks on my laptop; in the past few years I had marked out over 30 stores that sell both vintage and vintage-inspired clothing. With the kind of rush I haven't felt at all in this year of lockdown, I spent hours looking at each site and picking out a handful of items that were perfect.

Despite hearing again and again in my head 'this body now', I stalled when it came time to purchase my perfectly curated shopping carts on two separate sites. I texted the images of what I had chosen to a close friend. I needed that external validation of asking someone's advice when you already know the answer. When she confirmed I had chosen lovely items, it was the push I needed to hit 'purchase'.

When the first packages arrived about a week later, I greedily ripped them open, not even considering if I might want to retain the packaging for returning the items. In fact, for the first time in my life, I hadn't even considered if they would fit. I pulled out two 1940s-inspired organic cotton jumpers and two shirts: one black and white stripes with a pussy bow and one blue and white with swallows.

They all fit perfectly. I couldn't try them on fast enough and each time I stood before the mirror looking at them, I felt different. For the first time in longer than I want to admit, I looked at myself and thought 'I am beautiful and I look exactly the way I should'. It wasn't just that I looked like myself in how I feel, but that I looked like who I am at the core of my being.

As I stood in front of the mirror wearing the blue and white shirt with swallows, I felt my 9-year-old self inside start to cry. She cried huge sobs of relief. She cried pure happiness and joy. I had finally put her in the clothes she had always wanted to wear. I have spent many years understanding the ways I need to nurture and heal my inner child. I have spent years wasting time berating myself and hating myself. I have spent years thinking that I ‘can’t’, or I ‘shouldn’t’ when it comes to clothing.

That night I decided to watch one of my all-time favorite Kathryn Hepburn films, *The Philadelphia Story*. The internal crying of my 9-year-old self came full force to my life then. It took 25 years to return to what I had always known I wanted. 25 years of building and shaping until it arrived, fully formed and ready for me to pay attention.

Fiona Moore

Deep red

A STUDENT female
nineteen tall & thin
wearing jeans &
scruffy jersey under
a long black oilskin mac
bought in the Mallaig
fishermen's co-op
her head full of
wine dark seas
has got off her bike
to look through

A WINDOW
one large
clear pane lit
very bright
in winter dusk
& only
one
thing
displayed

A DRESS deep dark
deep red strung up by
invisible cords &
tilted at an angle
as if launched into
orbit long full skirt of
crinkled silk fanned
out in a triangular
sweep bodice plain
& tight with narrow
shoulder straps oh more
art than dress if
even in two dimensions
it takes flight how
would it in three worn by

the student who
wants the dress in the
almost abstract way that
before she's only longed
for love or fame or
adventure all now
reduced to this

window
immaculate
barrier to
entry
showing the
price £85
as far to the
sun from this
street where

the dress continues to
glow each time she
cycles past to & from
lectures etc until
one day it's not there
& isn't ever until
decades later passing

she wishes she'd
dared to go in
try it on see
how it looked on her
oh unworthy of such
beauty she'd fail
the dress & not right
to long for something
so expensive what
clichés was she enacting
just by looking at it

in the window
that now fronts
some other shop in
the medieval street
where she stands

imagining the dress
still hanging in
someone's wardrobe
out of which the skirt billows
in the draught
when the door's opened
colour of half-dried
blood deepest red
beautiful stain of all
inwardness that

she still wants
to hell with
the stereotypes
of this wish

Julia Ruth Smith

She's Contrary

Suede

A small girl collects cockles on a mudflat, her pale blue suede ballerina shoes ruined forever and freckles on her nose.

Spots

I liked spots and then everyone liked spots so I never wore them again. The same with stripes but even more so.

Blue

I remember a motorbike, and a newborn child and a pair of blue jean dungarees, being thinner than ever; being too young with short-cropped hair and the summer.

Flip Flops

The doctor said in late October, are you going to give birth in flip-flops? The nurse said, Albanian? It rained when you were born.

Hoops

One day I wore big hoops in almost closed holes and everyone said I should wear them more often because I looked feminine. I lost one of them in a bottomless bag.

Silver

I bought myself a silver ring, sure I would be alone forever. You came briefly, beautifully as I paid it off and then you angrily left. So I was right.

Socks

At the airport they make me take my boots off. I have huge holes in my socks. That's what you get for not listening to your mother.

Skirt

The skirt I am wearing cost me 2 euros, second-hand. When it blew up yesterday with a gust of wind, you'd have thought it was Prada.

Yellow

In unusual snowfall I wore a bright yellow anorak. There was just me and Sandro and my dog out that day so no-one even noticed, so heavy was it coming down.

Pink

I'm no pink girl. But Nico was getting married and Eli said try it on. Chiara said, wear it with boots. And it sparkled pink sequins.

Kate Falvey

Time on My Hands

Rings I have known:

Cheap heaps of fused
faux stones, relentlessly turquoise,
blotched with dark declivities;

a real aquamarine once, tremulous,
absorbingly inadequate with a split
silver band and a sparkle of guilt

(all gifts robbed from the store
of my mother's wishes and my
father's steadily employed pride);

a sterling fish with a peace sign braided in;
a poison ring painted with white-bewigged
ladies, plotting something dire at court.

Tiny drippings of hearts and daisies dyed
to match piddling earrings that itched
my uncertain lobes.

And, ornate and globular, a kind of liquid-looking
blue-lipped pansy-flower thing.
This was the era of lava lamps and strobes.

Later, a dim brown cameo, oblong and morose;
the requisite shamrock tossed winkingly onto a slice
of Connemara marble (a real Dublin shop and the cost of a meal);

a white gold wedding band found on the strand
embossed with initials they weren't my love's
which served as a herald that all would be lost.

Lately, I'm given to tiny indulgences
like amber and peridot wings
for prayers to close these fingers
on some real, unassailable thing.

Jivan K

Kaur

The Sikh Princess

The long sleeves protect her from judgement and smirks,
the leggings and tights cover up what you classify as dirt,
the *chunni* on her head humbles her, protects the tenth gate.
Who she is, what she wears – should not be up for a debate!

The *kashera* symbolises she can control her wandering mind,
her clothing is the outer cover and the selection takes time.
An expression of her inner woman – the warrior she represents,
an honour to her ancestors, it's more than material and threads.

The patterns of the *phulkari*, the *sari* and her *salwar kameez*
Empowering our sisters to live without the need to please.
Stop feeling empty, partial, shame or staring at the ground.
continue to walk on Kaur and don't forget your crown.

Punjabi translation:

Chunni – head scarf.

Kashera – an undergarment for the lower body that is specially tailored and worn by fully initiated Sikhs.

Phulkari – refers to the folk embroidery of the Punjab and floral work, the designs include not only flowers but also cover motifs and geometrical shapes. The embroidery uses darn stitch on the wrong side of coarse cotton cloth with coloured silken thread.

Sari, salwar kameez – Indian women's dresses.

Maud Woolf

The Most Beautiful Dress

When Lauren opened her closet, she saw the most beautiful dress.

She wanted to put it on straight away, but she was dirty and smelt bad and the dress was so fresh and crisp that she would have ruined it. She went to her shower instead and washed off the two weeks of accumulated dirt. It was mostly dried sweat but there was also food sauce, grit under her nails, grease on her face and deep in her hair. She took her toothbrush in with her and brushed the stale food from her mouth. She spat out the bloody toothpaste and then brushed them once again. She came out into her room naked and cold, wet hair rat tailed on her forehead.

Lauren didn't want to get into the dress soaking wet, but all her other clothes were dirty too, lying in discarded piles around her home.

So, she sat naked and cross-legged in front of the mirror to brush out her hair. It had been a long time since she had looked in the mirror and it made her recoil a little but the image of the dress, clean and starched, superimposed itself over her reflection. Lauren never had liked looking herself in the eyes. She was afraid they would move in the wrong way.

Lauren walked around her house, shivering, hair drying slowly on her bare shoulders. She noticed for the first time how ugly it was, how messy. She began to clean, first tidying then scrubbing. She put away the dishes and brushed the floor and wiped off the dust, and then, when everything looked fine and neat, she went for the chemicals under the sink. The toilet needed disinfecting and she had to wash her clothes.

When all the work was done it was only four hours later (and that was so short compared to the weeks that had passed before, the months, the years). She was dirty again, so she went back into the shower and this time she used conditioner and body wash and afterwards she moisturised.

This time she used a hairdryer and put a little mascara on around her eyes (which stayed in the right place). She put on clean underwear and stood in front of the closet and looked again at the most beautiful dress in the world but again she hesitated. The stench was suddenly overpowering.

The rotten smell of the house was terrible and cloying and she gagged a little as if smelling it for the first time. It was worse because the smell was all her, her body and hair and food.

She ran around the house in her underwear throwing every window and door wide open, so anyone could get in. The wind picked up and rustled the lamps, her hair and the curtains.

The smell exorcised, Lauren crept up the stairs slowly, reverently now, her bare feet not making a whisper on the carpet. She was scared of the dress, but she wanted it. It might not fit, and she would fall back into bed and decompose, and her bones would melt through the filthy bedspread. Or it would fit but she would look wrong in it, a gangly monstrous imposter in a doll's outfit.

She closed her eyes as she took it out, to hold back the fear. Her hands remembered how to feel as she touched it, sliding down its length, pinching the fabric to feel its weight. It was the smoothest thing she had ever touched and heavy like a bell, like an anchor, a rounded stone egg. It glistened in the light and every stitch was tiny and perfect.

Lauren had to step into it and the fabric puddled at her feet like sea foam. When she pulled it up, she held her breath but there was no need. It fit like nothing had ever fit before. It was more comfortable than the pyjamas she had worn when she was a sleeping child, as easy as a school uniform and more glamorous than any sequinned party dress. It fit so well it made her realise that nothing had ever fit her before. No house or haircut or hand.

As she pushed her arms through the sleeves, Lauren felt the feathers begin to unfold from under her skin, bristling out from the epidermal layer. She let the skirt fall and saw for the first time the colours of her new plumage; baby blues and cherry-bright pinks and soft misty greys. She stretched out a leg and saw a hooked claw, as sharp as the point of a ballet dancer's toe. When she shrugged her head through the neckline, she opened her mouth and the sound that came out was high and fluting. She hadn't spoken in so long and now there was no need for talking at all. There was no need to do anything and nothing to do but exist.

She shook out her wings. The window was still open.

Lara Frankena

Une Flâneuse Manquée

I'd always been envious of Parisian *flâneurs*, especially when I lived there. Out alone after dark in the Metro, a man pinned me to the wall as his friend laughed. Confounded by my skirt which he tried to lift like a skirt, he punched me instead.

I rode home with a bloody lip, a line of William Least Heat-Moon's *Blue Highways* ringing in my ears: *She had the skin of a Dresden figurine and a mouth like a Fruehauf driver.*

So I ditched Paris and went to Dresden.

Anissa Praquin

My clothes aren't here to seduce you, that's my job

He said 'I like the way you dress'

as if there were more to the outfit than a single item of clothing. I pause, thoughts suddenly caught up with the hem in the crease of my thighs.

'There's just something about a short skirt-'

he says as it slips up to my waist with no give, no resistance, and plenty of room for a pair of hands to slip underneath.

'If you really liked them, you wouldn't be so eager to see them off.'

Now I am only wearing skin, settling into the familiar prickle as it adjusts to the fresh cold air. Now there can be no misinterpretation.

It was a purely practical choice, meant only to cover me from there to here, easy to move in and to remove. A body bag. A burial shroud, pre-resurrection. It wasn't meant to be a hint, or a tease, and the thought it might be sends hot blood rushing up my neck.

Exposed by clothes. I should have turned up naked.

Erin Gannon

Fishnets and a Fur Coat

Prelude

You see, I wanted both of them on their knees.

1.

It's such a palaver, to pull off such a getup –
the waxing, the shaving, the plucking – there's twisting,
and dabbing, sometimes glue. You must be prepared
for the investigation of any curvature.

If you're going to go half-ass on fishnets and a fur coat,
best just not to bother. It's an enchantment, darling.
Cast it poorly at your peril.

Pro Tip #1: Nothing but killer red lipstick will do.

2.

To the theatre! Of course, the late entrance,
– kiss, kiss! – and the excuses – 'Lord, the taxi driver!
I thought he was abducting me to Paisley!' –
These moments are so giddy 'cause it couldn't matter less –
truth or lie. I weave my tale, my spell, it's an improv
jazz solo; what matters is that the words are bewitching.

Next, we walk to the bar. Already, the fishnet is velvet
against softer, freshly shaved thighs, and there is nothing
to stop me flicking my trashy, crimped hair, except my own sense
of overkill. I over-return his smiles and eye contact, though my part
of the conversation happens while I look away across the street,
or to the always generous Glaswegian sky, so full of weather,
so free, whipped wild, with its eighteen shades of clouds.
Ooh, baby, ooh, baby, ooh.

Pro Tip #2: Always buy your first beer and shot yourself.

Pro Tip #3: Always buy a beer AND a shot.

At the table, I act like I've just left the shipyard, still in my overall
crud, high-vis vest glowing, the oil on my face that of an altogether
different nature. I cane my pint and curse like a comedian.

But! I wave my hands like I'm uncomfortable, and I don't know how to handle the stares from the next table. Half my high is walking this tight-rope. I'm a little trickster, and I like showing off these legs.

Beers inevitably end, but after a taxi to Central station, there's an offer for more cocktails.
'I'm so sorry, I've made plans with a friend.'

Round one goes to me.

3.

Strutting to the traffic light, crossing Sauchiehall, I am ready to fuck my own self, creamy from victory. I pull my collar up, sink my earlobes into synthetic, second-hand fur. Bend my ankle at the red light, you know that runway model hip-cock; she's too sexy for this corner, but I'm not. I don't bother to light a cigarette, and I don't need to pout.

4.

I don't sashay, I'm a whoosh! Half-jiggling into Bar Number Two, an hour late, with a worried forehead. 'What time do you call this?' He's says, but he's handing me my Guinness, baby. No anger will come against so much promise. He's waited, and I am worth it.

I stand in the boys' circle making everything soft, and foul-mouthed. Every time I move my legs against the tiny black holes, a slight breeze freshens all that new skin, like, you're in a metal bar in Glasgow, but your legs are all on a towel at Venice beach, oiled up and lazy. Glazed eyes and cheeky grins, offer me perfect little glasses of Jamey rocks. I know my job here; make 'em slobber, baby.

Pro Tip #4: Make 'em slobber.

Round two goes to the both of us.

Back at the flat, there's a celebration of sorts, the incessant conversation and constant agreement means I know the words 'soul mate', are stuck, unsaid, in our chests, rendering us both breathless and dizzy, and never mind the kisses. But something, somewhere cracks. Suddenly, The Frank Zappa's JESUS CHRIST too loud, and

the cider tastes like rotten – yet tingly – single malt, and he’s too fucked to drunk. I sleep on the couch, with the fur as my pillow. I cry a little, yes, ‘cause of the dopamine comedown, but mostly for the spell that’s been broken and can never be put back and so the kisses even the kisses will never be the same.

Round Three goes to nobody.

Pro Tip #5: This is the price of magic.

Epilogue

No, these little glamours ain’t meant to last. Game faces fade fast—most people can’t even keep theirs up for a week. The fishnets and the fur coat may be thrilling in an ashtray, in a – you know – New York kind of way, but some dudes, well, you’ll see. They get this beady glow in their eyes. That’s not fascination, it’s fear. Remember the glow: It means they don’t want what they want and they’ll hate you for trying to give it to them.

Cara Hamilton

The Elegant Witch

Looking good and appearing stylish are things we mostly learn as we grow into ourselves and our bodies. Perhaps it is a cultural aesthetic, a character in a movie or an era that whispers in our ear.



Three years ago I had to create a radically new look and style in the blink of an eye, and make sure I looked good in it. As a transgender woman who came out at the age of 47 *and* works on stage, I am sure you see why my style would be vital. It felt like I had to perfect it all in a heartbeat and I did not intend to flatline. My stage presence would be irreparably tarnished if I got it wrong, especially at my age. Entertainment has got better in recent years, but it does still prefer its leading ladies to be young.

Before I changed my appearance to the world, I changed my name and removed all connection with it; my aim was to become

a success from scratch, so I was not going to refer to my previous self. Of course, if anyone wanted to find out who I had been, I am sure they could, but as much as possible I wanted the real me to have a fresh start, a new look and a brand new wardrobe.

A make-up artist is a must, and a good friend paid for me to have a make-up lesson with a professional, who asked me about my attire and what kind of look I aspired to. She knew exactly what to do, recommended mostly Estee Lauder, Nyx and a few other cosmetic brands, and I loved the look. I have kept with it, only amending it a little after compulsively watching John MacLean make-up tutorials.

Prior to my personal make-up session, I had given my appearance fanatical thought and created numerous mood boards with photographs of particular style icons on them. I am a self-confessed spooky bitch in any case, so black, yes, that is 95% of my wardrobe. However, there

is a finesse in what I like so this I explored. Plus my wider shoulders had to be masked, so scarves, V-necks, long necklaces and long tops are very much part of the everyday wardrobe.

A full understanding of what drives your style is key. For me it was observing particular women of a certain age that inspired me. Many transgender women in the prime of their life try and dress like they are 18, and that in my opinion is where they go wrong. Yes, the hormones running through them may be treating their bodies like a puberty racetrack, but their skin and age is quite apparent.

In my profession, I have been lucky to meet many of my 'magical' heroes – Uri Geller, Fay Presto and the late Paul Daniels. Uri Geller gave great advice on attitude; Fay Presto gave me the bravado and her love of sparkle has stuck. And Paul Daniels gave me my very first style advice.

Female style advice from Paul Daniels? Seriously? Do bear with me on this. Years ago, when he was starting to go bald, he began to wear a hairpiece. His approach was to slow down the appearance of losing his hair, whilst embracing it, thus keeping his look younger, owning it and controlling it. He did not try and look like he was 25 again. That taught me to own and control my age by looking at people who were older than me, classical in their style. I took pointers from strong, older women who had that dark aesthetic and whose body language and voice carried gravity.



Women like Charlotte Rampling whose performance in the movie *Angel Heart* made me want to step right into her skin. Her sense of jewellery and of attitude taught me a great deal. Or Lena Olin who – in the film *The Ninth Gate* – is to me is the epitome of style and chic. Her black, silk blouse and black slacks with simple diamond earrings is a staple for everyday wear for me. Stevie Nicks is of course an influence with her quirky gothic style, as is the Parisian actress Eva Green. These latter two being the influence on the Victorian attire that I wear on stage, if my performance is historical.

If I were to sum up my look from this, it would be a classical noir aesthetic, a gothic artistic elegance (with some French style) and timeless makeup, which does change from being a little retro to being quite French. In private life, when on stage reading minds, or raising spirits in a séance, this aesthetic works for me. Of course, a style is not just visual, it embraces as many senses as possible. The feel of my clothing is important too, so I tend to wear silk and velvet. I wear Versace Crystal Noir perfume as, whilst it is a fairly new perfume, it has a really classical scent. This further adds to the whole ensemble of the senses. Elegance as a concept is so important to me. It can go hand in hand with opulence but often it is a simplicity that has nothing to do with labels, but far more to do with being graceful and effortlessly stylish.

Whether on stage or off, my style in essence is the same. I am very comfortable in this look. It gives me confidence and I genuinely love it. In my private life, I get very little harassment related to being transgender. I do not pass to everyone yet, but that is okay because I feel and appear confident. And I believe it is my attention to my style that has had a positive impact on this. On stage I am told I look stunning and have presence, so I guess the fanatical work on my style has been successful. Covid aside I am very busy performing internationally and some of my shows have full houses booked up a year in advance.

So this is my style guide and these are my rules. Which I believe are – on occasion – important to break. This is why in my current publicity I am wearing teal lipstick to attract your attention.

Rebecca Kane
Crinoline

I woke up to crinoline piercing through my pelvis like thick, white claws.

I looked down and saw my thighs being cupped in its ivory cage –
restricting and protective, a poisoned lover's grip. The bones hung heavy on my hips.

Lopsided black widow
shifting down steps,
crawling and careful.

Tap, tap, tap.

Dry and breathing,
the bones are growing.

I was given an anti-inflammatory and an orthopaedist's number.

I thought I was special, but it turns out others just hide their hoop skirts better.

I feel it thriving in me, joining my ribs to my neck, my skull to my toes – joints
as heavy as satin. A bony virus rampant through my bloodstream, not violent but stagnant.

My lungs are filling with marrow. Gnawing Saber-tooth, you are eating me up like
antibodies, and I fear my spine might grow wings. I haven't the time to take flight. I have so
much to do, but I cannot move. My feet are callous, and my heart more so. I do not want the
burden of miracles if they are this painful. I went to the Gallery. I wanted art to heal me, but
the frames only reminded me of my stillness. And then, I saw her. I saw her stripped bare in
silks and I screamed: *Versailles I am calling to you. I think you are the only entity who can
help me. Versailles, Versailles – tie string around my fingers and point me to your heather
fields. I want only softness now: I am sick of cartilage. I am choking on bone!* The oil would
not allow her to nod but I knew she would have. I knew she would have nodded and smiled if
not bound by her own boning.

Lizy Simonen

Elastic Armor

It was the year of sheer polyester chiffon frills. Plastics that kept you hot in the sun and frozen in the shade. Quick drying everywhere but the armpits, which soaked heavy with dark shadows of shame.

I wanted men's Diesel jeans with five hundred pockets and no need to consider the inconvenience of my hips. I wanted thick jersey that would smooth over every bulge of pudge, not tuck under each roll like cling film. Socks that covered my ankles and waistlines that covered anything.

The flyer in my hand was as garish pink as the shop that produced it. 'Presenting our first ever sportswear collection! Release day discount.'

A sports bra had appeal. There was a fading scar between my breasts from an underwire that had snapped and gouged my skin. Rather than go straight to the sale racks at the back of the shop, I went to see what sportswear could offer.

The Bra was a wonder, a mesh of tactical tactile textiles. The straps met behind my neck and a band of elastic ran between my shoulder blades. Like a holster in an action film. Concealed carry.

Two layers of Lycra stretched across my chest. The first compressed my breasts into nothing. The second layers secured two foam cups that bounced back into shape when poked. A pair of fake tits to wear over the squashed reality. It seemed like a joke. They were a far cry from the Double-Cup Push-Up Balconette Experience that morphed my cleavage into an uncanny valley, but they were no more natural.

I looked in the mirror.

Oh no. It was perfect.

Everything fit. There were no wires to stab me. No frills or clinging or even bulges. My chest felt different, solid. But I looked normal. The overall reduction and addition of the bra left me flatter than usual, but looking like myself.

I was re-sculpted.

You want control, said The Bra. You want armor.

To forget the inconvenience of poorly supported flesh for a while. To not fear an escaped nipple or an unsightly strap. I would pay full (release day discount) price for that.

Some clothes are better now. Waistbands reach my waist, my skirts have pockets, and I haven't been betrayed by an underwire in nearly 15 years. Sheer blouses remain, damn them. I wear a lot of jumpers.

And I've still got The Bra. The elastic isn't as great anymore, and it looks downright bulky compared to the seamless microfiber version I bought last year. But it's part of my armory. A piece of control.

Batten down the hatches, says The Bra. Let's get to work.

Anna Lindsay

MUM-HUGS

red's my colour
snuggled into the soft fleece
of my pyjamas
bought for you when winter's chill
gnawed your age-frail bones
one gust at a time

red's my colour
warm PJ's enfolding me
in memories –
quiet cocoas by dance-flamed fireside
familiar anecdotes
lovingly retold

red's my colour
comforting my being
with well-worn
bedtime mum-hugs washed refreshed
reclathing me nightly
in more than fabric

Martha Nye

Alex

I love that there are people who
love me who make me clothes

I wear a hat, a scarf,
pumpkin-
coloured socks

in winter there is so much
opportunity to take

cover, our bellies soft in
the dark

today my jeans are just the right
blue, in this

desolate optometrist where I'm
trying to show off

Ruth Wiggins

La femme sauvage considers her wardrobe

What I really love about this mazarine dress are the breast-feeding slits.

The single thing I want is this – to be left. A green exclusion, in which I can nurse whatever thing I damn well wish.

Neck-to-ankle en plein air, listening to the woodpecker, or comfortable in my pantsuit, Strasbourg wool and silk.

On warm days wearing the river, my pale breasts buoyant – a blue otter on its back clasping a plump white fish.

Hands, feet, breasts and chin, all bare. An ad hoc crown of vines, the rest of me – hair.

Snap off the briar thorns one by one. Look! If I lick the back of one, I can stick it to my nose, become.

(after the *Licorne et femme sauvage* tapestry, Strasbourg c.1500)

Elizabeth Gibson

Winter Blazer

It was my second week of work, I got the afternoon off last-minute,
went to Primark, down into the men's bit, tried to be casual, perused,
until at last, I found the suits. I slid in and out of each, trying to show
no fear, no hesitation: *I belong here*, I told myself, *I have every right*.

It was all still so new and tender, being out, having a job and money,
being in the city. I had never known I could use a men's changing room.
I chose my suit, stood in line, paid, and off I went with my paper bag.
I got the train to York for a poetry night, borrowed someone's scissors

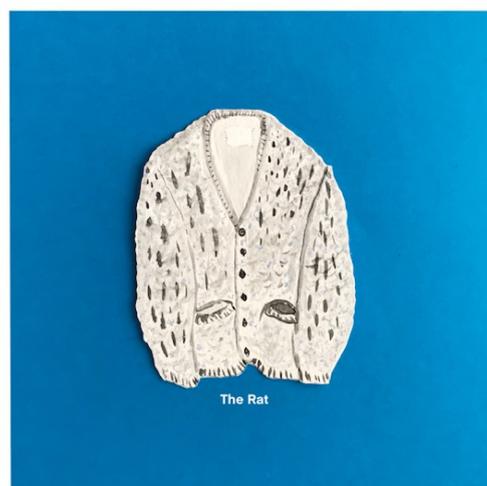
to cut off the tags, stood in my blazer that fit so well, to share poems
of blood and whales, and stars, and my queerness, tentative and brave.
The next night was the work Christmas do: a loud, fancy restaurant,
the women in dresses, elegant; me in my suit, orbiting, holding my own.

We drifted from club to club, to 80s songs, and I slid from my shell.
I was mistaken for a guy in one place, kept from the ladies' cloakroom.
I wouldn't hesitate to go out in my suit now, but I remember that time,
that winter, when everything was so new, and kids – it *can* get better.

Mary Fidler

I've Got a Problem: CARDIGANS

My earliest memory of cardigan comfort is what I dubbed **The Sick Sweater**. A white, fuzzy, loose-knit, slightly oversized cardigan belonging to my mom, that she would throw on for a quick chore outside in the backyard – usually hanging the wash. If I were ever feeling unwell, it was this sweater I would locate and don around the house, signaling either a mood of ennui (I was a tween) or the common cold. The Sick Sweater was comforting and even years later, when I would come home to visit, I would wrap myself in this cozy cardy on a cold morning waiting for the house to warm up and the coffee to brew. I now have my own version of The Sick Sweater and in true Sick Sweater form it's fuzzy, loose knit, and oversized – but all grown up in black with pearl buttons. I'm wearing it now as I write and wait for my own house to warm up, coffee in hand.



The next stop on the cardigan love train came in high school when I went rummaging through the attic to find the boxes of old clothes my mother couldn't part with. The elective class I had chosen was filmmaking and we were shooting an American Graffiti style 1950s teeny bop mini saga. As I went through her college clothes, I found some truly fine specimens of short, elbow length cashmere and angora numbers that denoted a sweater girl of the 50s. Along with a circle

skirt, saddle shoes and bobby sox, I was all set in the costume department. I even carried a few of those sweaters with me into my own college days.

After graduating and finding a place of my own, my budget and interest intersected at the vintage find. The love of the hunt in thrift stores or bonified vintage shops almost always yielded more interesting choices than the department stores. It was here I discovered my love for ‘old men’s’ sweaters: oversized cardigans of a vintage nature and more often than not of a fuzzier variety – like mohair. One in particular comes to mind and oh how I wish I still had it. **The Rat** was an exquisitely oversized, rich charcoal mohair sweater that would go over anything. I had a pretty strict all-black code back then and this elevated my look ever so slightly. During this sartorial phase, my style was described by a friend as ‘ragamuffin’ – lots of layers all peeking out at one place or another along the body.



In order to fully assess the extent of the cardigan situation, I decided to do a Marie Kondo on the lot. I searched my closet and attic and ferreted out every single cardigan in my possession.

I’m still a bit wistful about a gloriously furry one that came into my life recently but then had to leave again in a hurry. This sky-blue chunky-knit, thigh-grazing, open shawl collar wonder was an absolute FIND on a thrifting outing. But when I got home and wore it around the first day, I found light blue fuzz EVERYWHERE – ABSOLUTELY EVERYWHERE – already

puffing across the floor in its own little chorus line of blue fairies. So, I read up. What could I do to tame the fuzz? Put it in the freezer, I noted. Well, why not? There was room and I really wanted to keep this sweater. I didn't know how long to leave it but figured the longer it was in the deep freeze, the better. I probably left it in there a good couple of weeks. My husband did raise an eyebrow or two over this experiment but otherwise didn't challenge it. When I brought the blue confection out of exile and shook it outside, I envisioned a fully reformed sweater ready to be called into duty and serve without shedding. Unfortunately, that wasn't the case and despite it ticking all my other cardigan obsession boxes, I sent it back to the place I found it.

After an extensive inventory, I found close to 50 sweaters in my possession: cotton, silk, wool, cashmere, mohair, long sleeve, $\frac{3}{4}$ sleeve, short sleeve, tight knit, loose knit, hand knit, patterned, solid, heathery and even novelty. The prize for most of a certain color went to green. Who knew?

Hmmm. Okay. So maybe I do have a problem. Could I release some? No doubt. Will I? Not sure. *If* I do it'll be to pass on to someone else through swaps or shops. But now I know what I *have* AND if I ever do pare down, I know the ones I'll keep. It'll be the cozy, fuzzy kind that comfort both mind and body.

So yes, I may have a problem. But cardigans is a problem I like.

Kuli Kohli

Payal

These tempting ankle bells –
like the bangles on my arms;
like my vibrant powder and paint;
like the *bindi* on my forehead;
like my twinkling jewellery;
like my embroidered *salwar kameez*;
like the clinking of dishes.
Endorsing, defining, approving
my beauty as a woman.

Bells upon my ankles
keep me faithful.
Bells upon my ankles
keep me cultured.
Bells upon my ankles
keep me from escape.
Bells upon my ankles,
keep me anchored.
Bells upon my ankles,
steal my liberty.
Bells upon my ankles,
keep tabs on me.
Bells upon my ankles,
a meaningless sacrifice.

When I dance, I jingle.
When I walk, I tingle.
When I sit, I dangle dingle.
When I am in a crowd, I mingle.
When I am alone, I'm single.
With you my love, I shine –
I am silence, simple and divine.

Punjabi translation:

Payal – Ankle Bells

Bindi – Forehead Jewel/Art

Salwar Kameez – Punjabi Dress

Ruth Moss

In-between

In 1993, in my froglet stage,
still refusing to don a dress, I wore
a lilac boiler suit, silvery buttons
embossed with an anchor. Somewhere

between rubbed cotton and denim,
it did not chafe my skin, did not cause
'It's itchy mum! Mum! It's itchy!' as
so many other garments had.

At an age appointed 'sweet'
by grown men watching Alice-band
girls billow and swish as they jived,
I was a Parma Violet, anthocyanin,

wash your mouth out. I scribbled
notes in pastel blotters in-between
reading pages of Feynman, reclined
chest down, on my polyester quilt

having pruned off my school
uniform, watched it plunge to the rug,
standing almost bare like a style,
stigma, then pulling up an instant

blossom of light purple overall,
elasticated waist so sympathetic
to my puppy fat. Ta-da! I wore it
daily, washed weekly, until it eroded.

Sarah Oba

On Clearance: Snapshots of Childhood Dresses

For the launch of Skirting Around, Sarah Oba shares the first of three installments from her childhood memoir.

Today I took a bike ride through Komazawa Park in central Tokyo, and the chill in the air reminded me of autumn, even though it is the middle of spring. I am always very alert – perhaps on edge – whenever the predictability of the seasons seem out of step. Such pangs of intuition began over forty-five years ago.

In early autumn of 1975, it still felt like summer as I faced an unwilling induction into the society of motherless daughters – when my mother Opal died from leukemia. I was just a few months shy of eleven. As our last shopping excursion together replays vividly in my adult memory bank, it yields not only a tangible inheritance of three childhood dresses (outgrown long ago), but also a legacy of lessons taught through quiet example, moments shared, faded photos and the serendipity of strong Southern women – solid investments that have lasted for the journey of my lifetime.

I was the youngest of five, and shopping trips for store-bought dresses were limited since Mama usually made my clothes – choosing the pattern and fabric with some random input from me. Sometimes my older sister Ruth and I had matching dresses, as my outfit could be fashioned from leftover fabric. I felt so grown up matching my sister who was twelve years older, and her smart sense of fashion set great standards for a kid sister. My aunts admired my mother’s ability to do expert smocking on my handmade frocks. I was impressed with the miniature clothes she created for my Barbie dolls – using assorted remnants from scraps of material. She managed these sewing projects in her spare time after working swing shifts as a full-time registered nurse at the Divine Saviour Hospital and supporting my dad’s work as a church pastor. When I look at my annual photos from elementary school, almost every single dress I wore was handmade.

So it came as a total surprise when my mother suggested stopping by the fancy downtown children’s clothing boutique – Ruth’s of Carolina – on the main street of York, South Carolina, shortly before the Easter holidays in 1974. Mama must have known there was a clearance sale, after the change of the season from winter to spring – and that year she had neither the time nor the energy to make my dress for Easter Sunday. My adult self now realizes it was a kind of sign, a crossroads in my childhood.

The Easter Dress

My mother selected a navy-blue dress with a dainty, white Peter Pan collar. She especially loved its removable accessory – an oversized (and itchy from my point of view) navy blue

sailor collar featuring a stiffly starched and tailored red bow that rested upon three horizontal white stripes. It covered my shoulders and was securely anchored down the back by three shiny golden buttons engraved with a distinctive naval insignia design.

Not only would it serve as my Easter dress but it also became the dress that I wore for a family photo taken the following summer – minus the sailor collar, which was conveniently misplaced somehow, much to my mother’s chagrin and my own delight.



Those were the days when a formal family photo became the Christmas greeting card mailed out to friends and family, near and far. It had to be orchestrated several months ahead to allow time for processing the film, placing the order, addressing the envelopes or postcards, and writing/typing up a newsletter or greeting from the family. Mr. Good was a popular local photographer who positioned my mother, father, and me on an antique loveseat in our living room. The open archway

between the parsonage’s formal living and dining rooms worked as a framework that allowed just enough space for my four siblings to stand behind the seat whilst the elegant dining room chandelier cast an angelic glow in the background. As we smiled for the camera, how were we to know that this would be our last family photo together?

...

Over a decade later, I accepted a teaching assignment in Japan at a prestigious all girls’ school in central Tokyo. It was my first real job after university, and I was not much older than some of my senior students. The students, from kindergarten to Grade 12, paraded the hallways in the school’s signature uniform. I felt a strange warmth and instant familiarity with the classic design of their navy-blue school uniforms, which featured a sailor collar accented with a burgundy scarf. It finally dawned on me how similar the design was to the essence of the navy-blue sailor collar and dress from my own childhood, and I felt that connection like a heavenly embrace, a divine nod that I had embarked in the right direction on my career path.

Sarah’s story will continue in Issue #2

Lynn Genevieve

Fat Lynn

It is difficult to know where to start. Looking back at who I was – a medically and morbidly obese woman – I really struggle to see myself. Who was this person? She is so unfamiliar, and yet always there, a contradiction that confuses. Whilst she is physically no longer me, she is me, and I have named her – I now refer to her as *Fat Lynn*.

I never had a problem with using the term ‘fat’. I would use this term to describe myself, preferring fat to – obese, large, curvy, a woman of size, big – any alternative because there was no hiding it. Like the colour of hair – brown, red, blonde – it gave an instant picture, and I didn’t baulk at using it. *Fat Lynn* has never really left me. She is with me every day as I prepare meals, shop for food, read cookbooks, bake and talk. I talk about food a lot. I think about food all the time. I hope that by writing about my transformation – the good, the bad and the ugly – I can in some way exorcise *Fat Lynn* and give her a life of her own. Then I’ll be able to put her on the shelf, forget about her, or maybe occasionally, invite her to share her story, acknowledge her struggles and triumphs alike but know that she no longer resides somewhere inside me, and is gone for good.

My sister-in-law congratulated me after a year of ‘keeping the weight off’ telling me that it meant it was permanent. I was not so confident as *Fat Lynn* was still with me. Now, after ten years, I feel it is about time I believed it – believe that she will not be back; she has haunted me long enough. This is perhaps the gift of menopause, which has brought with it a wisdom that is empirical, self-assured, intuitively led and must be listened to. It is time to tell *Fat Lynn*’s story, so that I can fully live now.

Lynn Genevieve

Under Control

In one year I'd lost over 50kg, and I knew that people were seeing me differently as a slim middle-aged woman. No longer *Fat Lynn*, I was experimenting with new looks. Gone the voluminous cover all styles: I wanted to wear fitted clothing that clung to my new shape. Even with swimming and walking, this new shape had softness that draped on my bones, rather reminiscent of a Dali painting. I needed underwear that could gather and direct the rogue skin, give an illusion of shrinkage that did not look like last year's birthday balloons.

During my size reduction, quite early on I'd discovered the wonderful Gok Wan and his colourful and controlling underwear for voluptuous women. I did feel so good wearing it. Ironically, months later and several sizes smaller, I was finding it hard to feel attractive, constantly focussing on small bulges and wayward skin. I experimented with various control pants, hose, girdles, corsetry my granny would've been proud of, and settled on simple, stretchy, tight, lacy all-in-ones. But they didn't save the breasts from their sad, deflated demeanour – evoking the ears of a small Spaniel. I needed some serious advice. A client recommended the famous lingerie specialists Rigby and Peller.

You don't just walk into their shop and choose a bra. Well, you can, but they offer an expert fitting service by appointment only. I've been a dress maker and am no stranger to fitting clothing, but I was amazed by the skills of these women.

The first thing that surprised me was that there was no measuring involved, no tape measure, nothing. My lingerie consultant didn't even want to know what size I thought I was. It was like being at the hospital for a breast health check. Stripped to the waist, I opened the gown provided and stood straight, arms at my sides, and she looked... and looked, index finger on chin in emoji fashion as she considered my boobs. She asked me to raise my arms and she looked some more. At least my nipples don't look south I thought.

'Okay.' And with that she scampered out of the cubicle returning minutes later with a handful of bras. I was super impressed, but it didn't stop there. First she had to teach me how to put a bra on. Yes, I was ignorant of this skill. How could I have done it wrong for all these years? After doing it up at the front and twisting it around, but before putting my arms through the straps, I was required to bend over – right over – and lower my errant breasts into the cups. Then, I could slide the straps onto my shoulders.

To this day, that's how I now do it. It cuts out the need for a lot of tucking in and adjustments. Every bra fitted, perfectly, I thought, but she wasn't satisfied until I'd tried on several, and she found the style that best compensated for my lost flesh. Incredible, I learnt so much.

Kirsten MacQuarrie

Wedding Dress, 1989 and 2019

Pearl buttons at my wrists,
Lace cuffs long frayed by handshake lines.
Satin shattered, skirt hem in tatters,
From first night dancing until dawn.

Yellowed ivory endangered,
Sun-bleached and faded from the years.
In ribbon curls, frail petals blossom
Their time-worn tendrils wrap my waist.

‘So, does it suit me?’ I twirl and laugh,
Scatter the floor with silken leaves.
‘You look like I did,’ my mother says,
Raising her thin veil from my face.

Louise Holland

Multiple Choice Female

– *delete as appropriate*

I love it when you stare at my
eyes / mouth / nose / waist / legs / tits.

It's so good when you
caress / brush against / tease / kiss / grab them.

I just feel so
turned on / wet / joyous / grateful / bored / violated.

And I love it when some other women
high-five / assume things about / feign envy / compliment
me because of them.

I love being able to dress them in
sexy / tailored / funky / glamorous / ill-fitting and boring clothes.

They make me feel
powerful / feminine / targeted / attractive / self-conscious.

I use them to
get things / be more confident / find a warm body /
Pretend.

Andi Talbot

Check Out My Ass



IT'S ALWAYS
'THE BOYFRIEND HOODIE'
OR
"I SLEEP IN HIS T-SHIRTS"

NEVER
"CHECK OUT MY ASS IN HER SKIRT!"
OR
"DOESN'T HER DRESS LOOK SO GOOD ON ME?"

AND I WISH THAT WOULD CHANGE.

BECAUSE MY ASS IS GREAT
ESPECIALLY IN THAT DRESS SHE HAS
WITH THE FLOWERS ON THE FRONT

AND I ONLY HAVE ONE PAIR OF

'BOY JEANS'

THAT REALLY SHOW IT OFF.

Mirrin Hutchison
Thong Song

Peach, jade or black.
Lace, seamless, vinyl.
Try now.

Wear under your pride
the thing that rides
up and slides
in between your stride for
side to side marches. Abide.

Lie?

I promise you: comfy.*
Grip, stick, press:
For lines of 'perfect.'
Be brief, you hipster.
Confess.

Impressed?

Strung up ham and rubber bands
clench my ego into stance.

Understand?

Abort the sport, you fake seraph:
wear whatever the fuck you want!
Stare at the finish line: nook, needle, spine,
but don't taunt, want nor haunt.

Font?

Is this how a thong should write?

*Allure the curves of my calligraphy;
and instead read my bibliography.*

Wear **me**. And be.

(Comfy?)*

*Debatable

Emma-Jayne Punter

The man in the van

Dear Man,

Why do you insist on beeping at me in your van?

I know damn well you wouldn't, if I was with my man.

The thing that always gets me is this.

You think beeping and yelling at me running is genuinely okay because I am a miss.

I am NOT wearing my body-hugging shorts for your sexual harassment.

Believe me, I still would say no if my alternative was a casket.

I am NOT here for your viewing pleasure.

Why can't a girl just go out for her own leisure?

You honk and yell at me like I am a piece of meat.

Yet I have probably got enough brains to design an aircraft to ship you off to Crete.

I wish instead you would stop one day.

So, I could voice all of the things I would love to say.

Like how you would feel if someone did this to your daughter?

You would probably be in prison for committing manslaughter.

You know what men think when they honk, shout and yell.

You wouldn't like it if I were your daughter, I can just tell.

You make me feel scared when I am just trying to run.

Half the time I don't go because it no longer feels like fun.

I stopped wearing the shorts once because I didn't want the attention.

I wore my boyfriend's shorts instead, but I still got a mention.

I wish I could ask you if you are married or had a girlfriend.

I wonder if you would do this if she was with you, I bet she thinks you're a godsend.

But you're not, you are just like all the other men.

Who honk and shout at me as if they are fucking ten?

Please grow the fuck up its 2021 –

Women are running the world; in case you haven't twigged on.

And one day, you'll be answering to me because I will be your boss.

At the end of the day, this won't be my loss.

For I am not a middle-aged man with an angry chip on his shoulder

Who doesn't know respect when he sees it and just keeps getting older?

So, carry on shouting, if you think that is what you should do.

And I will keep on running because I am better than you.

Camellia Stafford

That

I'm wearing a cross body bag
with a chain strap that
bisects my breasts diagonally.
The bag rests on my hip.

What you got in there?
He asks that
like I'd have anything worthy of carriage.
I want to say that

if I unzip it
a flume of blood will gush out
and saturate him.
Instead, I'm embarrassed.

I don't tell him the keys inside it
are a weapon
I've pushed between the fingers
of my clenched fist

in the back of taxis that
followed the one with the driver who said,
if you were alone you wouldn't be paying,
whatever that meant.

It's not all about what I carry
in this bag across my body:
a shoal of pearls bustling,
a tissue from the pack.

It's also the reassurance
of the chain's cool metal loops
crossing my palm
that give me something to hang onto.

Angela Jeffs

Waist Lines

It was a shock when she realised: she had not worn a skirt for over 30 years.

There was only one in her wardrobe, and she could not remember the last time she wore it. A wraparound with an elasticated waist that no longer fit. Nice mixed-fibre fabric that hung well, and lengthways stripes that helped make her look slimmer. Not that she was fat. Just the same width all the way down. From the front and from the side.

What had happened?

Thinking about it (which involved a quick trip zoom-like into the deepest recesses of memory) there had not been that many skirts since the tight tweed mini run up in the mid 1960s. A brown midi corduroy flaring from a very snug waistband saw her through early mothering years in the 1970s; and then there was the body-con white linen number that was part of an ensemble, designed for travels abroad in the early 80s.

But something happened when she got to Japan, and the ensemble mouldered unworn in summer rain and heat. She discovered traditional hand-dyed and woven farmers' trousers for everyday wear. And high-end designers who saw clothes as art objects, fabrics that could be cut but mostly folded to resemble origami. It was the first time in her life she had enjoyed disposable income and every new collection from the Greats – Issey Miyake, Rei Kawakubo, Yohji Yamamoto – proved both a revelation and wholly irresistible.

Her partner was surprised when he saw the clothes she began to favour, mostly trousers and tunics, layer upon layer. But when he went shopping with her one day at Plantation (Miyake's cheaper range; she was not that rich) and he saw the average age of women checking out the rails, he got it: they were clothes that suited all body shapes, that helped cover – in the eyes of the customers at least – a multitude of sins. (They could be lazy, let everything hang out...)

There was one more skirt, part of a linen suit in Power Black from Kawakubo's *Commes des Garçons* range in 1991, for when she travelled to Toronto for a wedding. Introduced to a smiling woman dressed head to foot in daffodil yellow, she saw her daughter's future mother-in-law's face drop, and then struggle to regain composure. Why would anyone (she apparently thought) come to such a joyous event dressed as if attending a funeral.

By the time she left Japan, her body shape had completely gone to pot. While aesthetically pleasing, Japanese design had physically done her no favours at all.

Now (just like her mother who in later life blamed genetics instead of fashion) she has no waist. Which is sad because once upon a time she had a lovely figure.

V Churchill

holes

after Eileen Myles

in the 90s
we could hide
our poverty
holes in everything
money was
for drinking
clothes were
second-hand
at nineteen I bought
a wide-collared
brown-checked
three-piece suit
I'd sit on the tube
drinking
for courage to
enter a room
alone in that suit
I was not attractive
in a dangerous way
not like at twelve alone
in a room with an
adult male
aware of something
I couldn't see
yet
felt responsible for
I found comfort
in that wide-shouldered
silhouette
how the waistcoat
held my
swollen chest
tight in that suit I
disappeared and felt
the most powerful
I ever had
I carried that 90s style
around with me
like a torch

until I wanted someone
to be proud of me I
threw out the
tights with holes
fixed the underarm
rip in my coat
replaced my
dog-eared Dr. Martens
to prove I was not
falling apart
when I was young
I found safety
dressing in men's
clothes
finding femininity
more like
impersonation
this body
these boobs
did not
come with a manual
I slapped a man hard
across the face
when he stuck
his hand up
my very short skirt
thinking about it
my favourite dress
is full of holes
beyond repair
I just can't bring myself
to let her go

Pamela Benjamin

Man Suit

I'm making a man suit.
Bacon and bratwurst and BBQ tools
weave and dangle –
I can run a grill too.
Fire and knives don't scare all little girls,
but men bunch the paper and piss lighter fluid
because a woman's place is in a bikini.

I'm making a man suit.
Chain-mail cans I crushed after shot-gunning
jangle and drip –
I can hold my whisky too.
You couldn't see I was drunk,
because men are allowed to drink
and I am in costume.

I'm making a man suit.
Beard and hat and three-day-ago shower
make me invisible.
I don't have to be pretty anymore and
I can still get a date.
Brushing teeth is for suckers:
deodorant bourgeois.

I'm making a man suit.
Meaningless sex with non-people
makes me important.
Fuck them, they're just bitches,
my heart encased by feeling good at the time,
I erase all phone numbers
because commitment is for queers.

I'm making a man suit
but don't need your paper to do it.
I don't need your alimony, palimony, plastic
to tailor this fit.
You can't pay for my tits.
I am more than just my pussy,
but you can't see me without my man suit on.

Cecile Durel

The Worker Costume

The first time I put on coveralls and a pair of safety shoes, I felt like a little girl in a dad costume. Silly *and* super-cool.

Cars were always a *thing* for me, but I never told anyone. It was a dirty little secret. The way a kid who becomes a baker after his dad might have a secret love for Vivaldi, because no one told him loving classical music is okay. Of course it's okay, but *he* doesn't know.

Well, I didn't know. I was a pianist, a poet, an all-around, to-my-core artist. And it was unimaginable that I could like football and cars. To most people, those were actually my biggest flaws. So, being a writer – straight out of an over-intellectual, painfully scientific yet artist-bearing family – it was a radical left turn to go train as a mechanic.

But I found myself a garage that would break me in, as we say, allow me to get my hands dirty and maybe even learn a thing or two.

Now, I come from a world where fashion is *important*. Theatre, cinema, writing pitches. Actors, premieres, work-lunches. For years, I've been dressing for an industry of seduction. I learned to love power suits; I started wearing Brogues because they made me feel so slick; I allowed myself to paint my eyes the most outrageous colours – my best move being to fit an entire rainbow on my eyelid (and, man, I rocked it).

So I remember precisely what I wore to that meeting, because I spent a day carefully choosing each item down to my socks. I was a young woman, going up to an auto shop owner to ask him for a few weeks of free training in exchange for free labour from someone who knew literally *nothing* about mechanics. That first impression was going to be key in getting my foot in the door, and this guy – who specialized in classic cars – was *the guy* I wanted to learn from.

I wore a pair of smart, dark-blue, high-waisted trousers, with a black, short-sleeved turtleneck, a pair of simple, black leather shoes (designed for men), black socks and a long, thin, black coat. No rainbows there. Covering almost every tattoo I have. Hair up. Little enough make-up to pretend I was wearing none.

It might not be the clearest picture in your mind, but it looked like an interpretation of what a mechanic would wear, translated to everyday clothes. The blue pants, the shoes, the practical colours. I looked at myself in the mirror; if I had been *trying* to look like a writer doing research on car maintenance, that's probably what I would have worn.

Turns out, when you actually get the job, you have to buy new clothes. Clothes that will *protect* you. Which is a funny word to put on it. I had never asked that of clothes before.

They'll tell you that you only need two things: safety shoes and either work trousers or coveralls. And when they say work trousers, they know exactly what they're talking about. The trousers road workers and factory workers wear. *Those* trousers. The *work* trousers. Coveralls look exactly like the bottoms, with a little extra *work* on top.

I wanted nothing to do with coveralls. I didn't think they looked cool. But my best friend convinced me that they were the more practical option. In summertime, I bitterly regretted listening to him; in the winter, I appreciated it. Because, I only have *one pair* of coveralls. No spare trousers, no spare jacket. The clothes that go underneath change every day, but the coveralls stay the same. That shit is expensive.

Let me tell you about the shoes, because the shoes are golden. Safety shoes always felt sexy to me. I also think that toe socks deserve a comeback and that watches make my hands look fat therefore must be overrated, so take it with a pinch of salt. But safety shoes get you through anything. They're metal plated and acid-resistant. Pretty cool.

You get them in a regular trainer shape or as ankle boots. I've met far too many people who go for the regular, boring, discrete version, whereas I believe safety shoes are your best chance to feel like a cowboy. Big shoes, big soles, a car could fall on your foot and your shoe would be intact; let's use that design to show the world you're a bad-ass.

Needless to say, I went for the boots, 70 quid Redstone, on the cheaper side if you still want all the important features (talking about the acid resistance). Those were a no-brainer and now every time I put them on, I know I mean business. It also means I'm less scared. Less scared to climb something. Less scared to crawl somewhere. Less scared to put my hands in dark oil,

cut and burn my fingers, even sometimes break a bone with a poorly directed hammer. All of those things that I really don't want to do when I'm wearing my finest pair of suede Brogues become possible – and exciting – in a grounded pair of safety shoes.

But that's the easy part. Because in those big shoes, your feet look like men's feet. And no one looks at your feet in an auto repair shop anyway. When you're a woman, they just look at everything else. Your hair, your nails, your makeup, your boobs, your ass, your technique, your vocabulary, your reactions. It's pretty hard to be invisible if you're the only girl, yet you might feel like no one is ever really listening to you.

When you think about sexism in mechanics, you might easily convince yourself that the dress code is the least of your problems. But let's face it, the dress code is always at the heart of it all. If you allow people to dress however they want, you allow them to be who they are. If you allow people to be comfortable in their uniform, you allow them to enjoy the work they do. And when we get to be who we are, and get to love what we do, we might just start to grow and evolve. Before you know it, status quo goes out the window.

Don't get me wrong, I'm sure the men in this profession don't love the clothes either. I'm sure they don't feel sexy or empowered. But at least the clothes are designed to make their job easier: they are *practical*. That's such a key word in mechanics. Practicality. Everything is applicable, concrete, purposeful. The fact that there are no work clothes designed specifically for women implies that there still isn't a place for women in a workshop.

Of course, if you look hard enough you'll find the odd pair of trousers marked 'Ladies' in the fourth hardware shop you visited this week. Even I found those. But if you live where all the women's work clothes ended up, do let me know you, because I might just move.

Anyway, coveralls are awesome. Theoretically. You can lie in dark oil without a care in the world. You can wear as many layers as you want underneath. You can kneel and reach and squat. You have pockets, so many pockets. Endless pockets. Pockets on your legs, on your chest, pockets to reach into the pockets you might have underneath. I love the amount of pockets coveralls provide. It's like they're trying to compensate for my collection of skirts.

And then there's everyday life in coveralls. There's the fact that when I need the toilet, I need to open my suit fully, take both arms out, hold the top part so it doesn't touch the floor while I pee and then squeeze back into the whole thing inside a tiny smelly cubical. There's that annoying little zipper where my penis would be, that reminds me that no one else in the shop has to dance this dance. Which means by the time I come out of the bathroom, they'll all have had their coffees and cigarettes and be back to work. And I'll be *a girl* for taking a longer break. So I don't. I don't smoke if I need to pee, I don't grab coffee if I need to pull my pants up because I chose the wrong type of underwear this morning and I'm wearing those annoying blue panties with the weak elastic.

There's also no room for breasts or hips in coveralls, which means I had to take the biggest size available to fit my D cup in there, which means the legs and arms are visibly too long. And then there's the fact that when it gets too warm, everyone but me can crack open that zipper and cut themselves a break. I tried it once. *Once*. That's when I realised that no matter what I wore underneath, if I opened that top zip, it was like I was flashing my boobs. Suddenly all you could see was my rack.

But at the end of the day, coveralls aren't too bad. I do like wearing them, and they allow me to work. But they're part of the million little things in that wonderful world of cars that remind me it wasn't built for me. With my security shoes and my coveralls on, I feel like a leftie using a pair of right-handed scissors. The worker costume convinces almost everyone outside the workshop, but the guys inside see a little girl trying to be her dad. Sort of cool, but mostly silly.

I *love* mechanics. Fixing a car is now one of my favourite feelings. It's fascinating, it's exciting, it's fun, it's hard in the best of ways. And it'll be hard for a long time. Old ladies will continue to interrupt me as I change their tires to tell me how great it is to see a girl do this job. And my feminist heart will keep wondering whether that's a good or a bad thing. Co-workers will assume more often than not that I need their help. Bosses will say horrible things they think are progressive on a daily basis. But my clothes *don't* have to play by the same rules.

I'm waiting, excited, for a pair of coveralls designed for boobs and hips, for people who pee sitting down. I'm waiting for that piece of clothing to be on my side in proving to an industry that is shifting gears that I *can* get the job done. And anyone who can offer that for less than 200 quid has a buyer in me.

Kate Meyer-Currey

Scrubber in PPE

I wish I was a runway model
Now they want diverse body types
I'd be well in there. Apparently scrubs
Show my curves, according to the nice
Nurse at work, but she gets the booty
Thing. I just think my trousers are celebrating
All that popcorn I ate in bed when I got in
From a twelve-hour shift on the psych ward.
I get the meme which shows a frazzled woman
Like me saying 'trying to find something to wear
That isn't scrubs or pyjamas.' I can relate.
I miss my normal clothes and my legs
Have a panic attack if I show them a
Skirt or a dress. They have forgotten what they
Are. I spend most days at work donning and
Doffing wipe clean scrubs in shades that don't
Suit me (that rankles, I hate blue) and then
Accessorising them with PPE in nasty plastic.
There's the slip-on booties that are more like
Slip-on-the-floor booties; the gloves which
Don't add Audrey Hepburn glamour to the look
(The black rubber ones were appreciated by
Those who have broader tastes but they didn't
Last), aprons in blue or yellow – the latter make
Me look like Big Bird from *Sesame Street*,
Visors (*Flashdance*-style) / or *Minions* goggles
(Don't be too matchy-matchy). The total effect
Is overkill. Even RuPaul couldn't turn it out as
A plastic fantastic fantasy. My low point was
When the psychiatrist asked me if I like the
Stuff. Pervert. I prefer leather, PVC and rubber,
Thank you, Dr. But I definitely need a style
Makeover thanks to this lot. I resent a world
Where I have to wear a mask to do my
Shopping and the patients said I looked like
Hannibal Lecter with it on. I spend working
Days in a sweaty blur, where I don't feel right
In my own skin, and leave a trail of sweat
Behind me wherever I walk. If that's what hot
Flushes are going to be like, you can keep

Them! When an arsonist informed me he
Felt like burning something recently my first
Thought was 'take my uniform, my PPE and
Stick it on the flames.' I'll be wearing this stuff
For the foreseeable, at this rate. They can
Even bury me in it when I'm breathing my
Last in the nursing home. Plus surgical socks
And an adult nappy, of course. I've lost that
Joy in clothes shopping and personal
Adornment that Covid has robbed me of.
And I hate cosy loungewear and Uggs so
Scratch that for my days off. Still, every day
I wear my own clothes feels like a lost
Civilisation in the wardrobe time forgot.
I'm already wondering what to wear today,
With an urgency that reminds me I'm still a
Woman who wants her visible identity back.
I've still got it, baby, it's just plastic-wrapped
To keep us both safe from cross-infection.
And it's even lubricated with my perspiration
Plus the tears I'm shedding for my good old
Fashion days, when my body wasn't a vector
For viral transmission, an object of shame.

Susie Campbell

LINGERIE: A GRIMOIRE

TO GO FAR

For travelling into another body, the skin of horse or deer gives speed, stealth from the pelt of a mouse. Skin must be worn next to the skin.

Wrap the body in linen for other crossings.

Bend metal fastenings to hinges, open hook and eye. Strap endurance and elasticity around the ribs for orbit.

TO RETURN

Feathers must not be used for trim nor beetle wing. Only an upright garment ensures return to human form. The body comes back to its linen shroud, seeks its print in the ground.

What is outside can be folded within, retracted gently or veiled behind silk and gauze.

TO BIND

Lace up your enemy's inhibitions. Tight. Say this body is too heavy for its flight, or too porous. If leaky, it cannot be caulked.

Lime and net its steel in flimsiness. Ban borrowed stockings and tie each body in its first gendered swaddle. Until it strangles.

TO RELEASE

Wear loosely or tie over the head in exchange for one with spots. If worn on the outside, burnish as a breastplate. Take ribbon for a bowstring or tie into a slingshot.

Use Lycra© to pad up for Eve's inevitable fall, this sports bra for the apple's drop.

TO DISGUISE

Hide a death's head under this balcony of bows, enamel scars with sheet lightning or the welder's arc.

Play peekaboo with a garrotte and hang dirty linen over the wet butcher's block.

TO MANIFEST

Travel from fashion to fashion until bone and steel flicker behind the lingerie curtain, ready as wildfire to leap.

What was inside now unfolding, knees straighten, heels kick off into the unknown. Body lightened for its space-walk, its new circumnavigation or its silent meditative squat.

Lisa Krawczyk

The Pick Up Note

I want
to slip into gender

how the mist sneaks silently
into the docks at night
or the cold latches
onto the wind. I want

to rip
at the seams
where the blouse don't fit

permit the fabric
fall where they may.

Holly Jackson

Ash

I burned your jumper in the fire –
The one I wore for months after you died.
When it was comfort, the warmth and the smell of you,
When being wrapped inside its wool felt like love –
Like being hugged, by you, again.

The night it burned I couldn't touch it –
Or the picture of us two, on my wedding day,
(yes, I burned that too)
I picked them up with tongs,
As if the smell of you wasn't already on me.

My anger filling me –
As the wool, engulfed by flames,
Turned to ash.
And I told myself, I wouldn't miss it,
Didn't need its warmth.

The tears in my eyes –
streaked the light from the flames,
Until they were extinguished,
and I was cold again.

Christine Fowler
The Verdict

Court cases decided

By what the victim wears

‘She asked for it’

‘What do you expect’

‘Dressed like that’

‘Tart’

‘Whore’

‘Hooker’

‘Prostitute’

Her words not heard

Her bravery unseen

Her pain unacknowledged

Her rapist looks on

Smiles at her distress

The jury reaches its verdict

He walks free

Jo Colley
Gazelle

These trainers with their history and their semiotics the three stripes marking time giving context as differentiation from other similar footwear, worn daily now, footsteps as metronome of pandemic. My mother's open-toed sandals signifying 1950s signifying housewife belonging to a body always open always receptive. Where the feet take us: to turn this way or that, the choices available to us in our own letterbox of time and culture. To stand still. Through electric blue platform boots signifying spaceman signifying buccaneer signifying Wonderwoman. Alas seen as available seen as inappropriate seen as pantomime in the eyes of a series of beholders. The man jogging past me, his footwear bearing the three stripes, a brother in choice, his calf muscles defined and inked with a symbol I can't interpret. Through Doc Marten boots signifying masculine signifying skinhead signifying opposition signifying lesbian. The signs misread misinterpreted misleading ms-leading. Workwear flats and kitten heels worn through decades in subservience in pursuit of position in conformity of necessity. Signifying nothing. The single pair of Jimmy Choo's at the back of the wardrobe in their soft lilac bag, signifying sell out, signifying the road not hobbled down.

Sarah Furuya

Full-bodied Manifesto

I will catch myself in shop windows riding my bike and smile at how nice I look. How broad my body is and long my legs are.

I will wear shorts, really short shorts, and I will enjoy the sun on my legs.

I will wear tops that are low cut and allow my cleavage to spill forth, admire the freckles that appear and the shades that come through.

I will remember that I am the heaviest I have ever been, the juiciest, the fullest, the biggest booty and the biggest boobs. I will enjoy it while it's here, while my appetite allows. I will enjoy my underwear and my curves and rolls. For I know they are mine to choose.

I will walk the beach in swimsuits and walk like it's my catwalk. I will notice my shame rise as I compare myself to the tan, lean bodies, well-toned windsurfers and I will giggle to myself – silly me I will say. Silly, silly me – you sweet thing. Do you want to start windsurfing every day? Stretching every morning? Yoga each afternoon? If not, hold your head up, stick out your bazoocas, relax your belly – but not your dignity – and enjoy your gorgeous beautiful body as it is, for this is the body you choose, every day, every input, every output, every delicious morsel, every glass of cool beer, every hike, cycle ride, swim, stretch, movement, walk, trip to the shops, lie-in, sleep, nap, stand up, sit down, every last choice you make every day, every thought, every coaching session, every single step; every choice is the one that gives you this body. Every last one. Every choice, every day.

I will swim and bathe and wear lovely wraps and throws and delight in my beach wears and wares.

I shall imagine I am Princess Margaret on Mustique.

Matthew Williamson on Ibiza.

Little Edie in the Hamptons.

Tziporah Salamon in NYC, being snapped by Bill Cunningham.

Oprah in Hawaii.

I will own the beach, each time I walk on it. I shall live my legend. My fantasy. As Valentina puts it. Yes, it's me, Valentina.

I shall applaud the others who do the same.

Bold, beautiful, expressed, unapologetic.

I will display myself like the fine active woman that I am.

And I remind myself to live the dream.

Humbly and confidently.

Every day.

Choice by choice.

Thought by thought.

With humility, grace and confidence.

No programmed, cliched apologies.

Head high.

Back straight.

Spine.

Relaxed.

Full.

Strong belly, soft and round.

Christine Foley

Your clothes are pink

My story is sewn into my skin.

It's tacked along the folds of flesh and the darkest secrets are stitched into the curves and creases.

My story is long and complex. It makes you uneasy.

Word by word, tethered at my lips.

My story is happy.

Scratches here and scars there.

The claw of a cat, now dead.

A fall in the park, a crescent moon on my knee.

My story is loud.

Bristling hairs, coarse and curling.

Growing, unapologetic and unrepentant.

My story is uncomfortable.

Blood-stained thighs.

Breasts that leak and pulse and throb.

My story is sad.

Lost parts. Lost loves. Lost children.

Wetness between my legs, the dark signature of menstruation.

My story is scary.

You are afraid. You don't want to hear it.

So

You flatten me and shave me and stuff me and clothe me.

You dress me up.

You drape your clothes over my shoulders, bare and raw and screaming.

You zip me in. Taut and tight and restricted.

You clip me, hook me, scoop me, mute me.

My story is not unique.

My story is age old and living, breathing.

The fabric of my dreams.

My story is mine

But you want to tell it.

My story is unravelling.

Unidentifiable.

My story is seeping into your clothes.

A stain.

My story is a bright red colour in a whitewash.

Your clothes are pink.

Margaret Grant

Coral Cardigan

Draped across the back of your bedroom chair, your coral coloured cardigan awaits your return. In your wardrobe, a plum faux leather jacket, soft to the touch, several blazers and several more cardigans. The wardrobe in the spare room holds shirts and blouses, jeans and trousers. There are drawers of lambswool sweaters - merino and cashmere too - neatly folded tops in a variety of styles and colours. Two drawers full of hats. Winter coats and raincoats hang in the press under the stairs. Come back and wear them. Don't let them wait in vain.

I was with you when you bought that coral cardigan. The last time we'd been to Blarney Woollen Mills together, and I was torn between a charcoal Aran-knit and an oatmeal wrap around. You'd insisted on buying both for me. So the day you bought that coral cardigan, I refused to try anything on. I didn't want to take advantage of your generosity.

The coral cardigan was a little large for you, but they didn't have a smaller size. I encouraged you to buy it anyway. It suited you so well. The colour complemented your hair. You bought a scarf and woolly hat that day too. You never left a shop with just one item.

I always fancied that cardigan. If you never get out of the hospital, I suppose, I could lay claim to it. But I don't want to. It wouldn't suit me as well as it does you, and I'd much rather see you in it again.

You have always taken such an interest in me and all my sundry undertakings. You have been so very good to me and so very good for me. I have basked in the glow of your attention, flourished in your regard. I am not yet ready to do without you. I am not ready to be without you. Please come back. For me and for all the clothes that wait in your wardrobes and chests of drawers, and the coral coloured cardigan draped across the back of your bedroom chair.

Jessica Faith Cooper

ANYTHING CAN BE THE BLOOD OF JESUS IF YOU TRY HARD ENOUGH

'I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.'

Psalm 139:14 (NIV)

If, when you bounce the tips of your fingers off your top, or if, as you press down on the fabric between your breasts, it springs back – like a trampoline – then it is too tight. Take it off. Try something else. Now bend over. What can you see? Any skin at all? What could a friend standing behind you see? What could your mother see? Or a male friend? Is there any visible lower back? Any butt crack? It's too low. Tuck in a tank top. Sit cross-legged on the ground. Or in a chair with your legs crossed. Can you see any flesh? Would you want your grandfather looking in there? You wouldn't? Think about your grandfather. It's too short. Too loose. Try again. Now stand up and lift your arms – really lift them, raise your hands in worship. Lift your hands like you're at church, singing your favourite praise song, and you want to impress the cute guitarist in the band. Impress but not intoxicate. Is there any belly? Any exposed skin? Too short. Tank tops, again, are your best friend. Now press your hand flat against your chest. Hold your fingers tightly together and hook your thumb under your collar bone. Is your pinky touching flesh? It shouldn't be. That's too much flesh. You could beguile any number of men with that amount of flesh – your father, your brother, your brothers in Christ, someone else's husband. Respectable men. Try again.

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You are twelve years old and shopping for clothes. Your mother is there; this is a date. You have been leading up to this for weeks, learning all about how your body is a sacred vessel, a delicate china cup. Your body is changing (or will soon be changing) and you are learning, together, the relationship between this power and its accompanying responsibility. Your best friend is doing the same thing with her mother; you are all there together. You are both pre-pubescent, but you are shopping and testing the clothes as if you are not.

Twelve years later you are shopping for clothes again. You want to buy a set of yoga clothes, something comfortable to move your body in. You have been ignoring your body for approximately ten years now, but in the past few days something about that has changed. You comment to your partner, 'I don't think I have moved my body like this in at least a year' – and at first you are only thinking about the pandemic and all the stillness, but then you are thinking more clearly and you change your mind. 'I don't think I've moved my body like this in years.'

You and your friend and your mothers are still at the mall. It is a major department store and has, clearly marked, a 'men's' section, a 'children's' section, a 'women's' section, and a 'teen' section. There are *so many clothes*. You aren't sure where to shop. The two of you are supposed to use this time to figure out what you can have and what you should avoid. It leaves you feeling a bit tentative; you don't know how to know what you want.

The options for yoga clothes online seem to be either long, flowing tank tops or tight, narrow bralettes, but you don't want either. You want something cropped, but not too cropped. You have a very long torso, wide shoulders; you are quite masculine, but have a tiny waist. No one is accounting for this. The only item that seems appropriate is available only in a larger size. You worry that this may not hold your breasts in.

The purpose of the trip is to find and purchase a single outfit that will best express your godly beauty. You are fearfully and wonderfully made – just don't show us too much. The purpose of this trip is to demonstrate to you, and to your friend, that teens can be fashionable *and* god-fearing. There are five tests and if you pass them, your body will be inscrutable. The purpose of this trip is to keep your body secure for your husband. But until then, you don't know what it is you are dressing to avoid.

You have recently re-connected with an old friend. You have a conversation with her about a translucent shower curtain she has just bought for her apartment. She says that it makes her feel 'too naked' and you know what she means – you have been thinking about buying a similar shower curtain for your own apartment and have been having the same concerns. You realise, then, that you have both seen each other naked. You have both drawn each other naked. You feel more naked in skimpy clothing than in a room full of people drawing you, than in the idea of standing behind a see-through shower curtain.

You find suitable clothes in the mall (it is easy, you have no curves). A pair of white cropped jeans with pineapples on the ankles. Another time, you buy a high-necked top in two different colours from The Gap. You wear them both often after that. Once you get your first bra – something small, nude and easily misshapen – the high lines of the cups are seen easily through the knit material. Is this intriguing? Suggestive? You find it hard to have a body and pretend like you don't.

You spend £259 buying yoga and active wear from an ethical clothing company in Denmark. You have never spent this much money on clothes all in one go and it takes you at least two days of sitting on it before you click 'go to checkout'. You buy, also, at the last minute, a full underwear set of a matching bra and a 2-pack of pants. The models on the website look joyous, they have something you lack – a casual comfort in the body. You decide that you do, actually, care about what you look like, and you want your aesthetics to reflect that. It's been a year of not moving and you don't want your body to stop having the potential to be strong.

You wear an open-backed orange dress to your church's Purity Ball a few years later. Because of the open back, you also neglect to wear a bra. Your breasts are still quite small and it is the summer, no cold nipples at risk of poking through. Another girl has worn a similar orange tea-dress, nipped in at the waist and skirting out towards the knees, looking like a dislocated 50s housewife. She is there to re-claim her purity following an experience of sexual assault. You are there to put a ring-fence around your sexuality. You are ring-fencing it for Jesus; you are ringfencing it for your husband. The ring you are given sits on your finger for years – until you look old enough to actually *be* married. Until you want to stop answering people's questions.

Recently, you went through a period of wearing your bath towel slung around your waist, like a man might. You have been staying at home and the room you are sleeping in is on the top floor. No one else has a room up there, and the door to the bathroom is only two or three feet from your own. When you move house, in the summer, you have to start reminding yourself that this isn't something you can do anymore. Aside from the fact that your new bathroom is quite a bit further from your bedroom, you also now live with a man.

Once, as a teenager, you forgot to bring a towel into the bathroom when you went for a shower. You don't realise this until after you have undressed, and after you have washed, so you are left with no choice but to make a run for it. What you don't know is that waiting just outside

the room is your family's female lodger, wanting to use the bathroom. But the door opens and there you are, locked eyes and naked, your freshly washed body running thick with adrenaline.

A few days after your new yoga clothes arrive, you wake with a pain in your lower back. You started doing yoga in the first place because of a pain in your shoulders, a tension in your neck and upper back. Now that pain has stopped but another has grown. You joke that the pain is moving downwards and that you'll just have to keep doing this forever, until one day you expel it out of your toes. Although you are in so much pain you can't really stand up straight, you find that you want to keep up with the daily yoga. It would be a lie to say that this didn't have anything to do with wanting to wear your new clothes.

Many years after the incident outside the bathroom, you have a conversation with your mother about the fact that you've stopped wearing a bra. She says that people can see your nipples through your top, that it might make some people uncomfortable, that it's not their fault. She says it's something about their brains, or their conditioning, their age, the times they have lived through. Shouldn't we do what we can to comfort? You respond by saying that the problem is not in your body, but in their reaction, in their interpretation of your neutral body as a sexual entity. You tell yourself, 'my body is neutral', and you start to believe it.

Another morning, after the yoga clothes arrive, and after the pain in your back subsides, your girlfriend reads something out loud to you about male testosterone. The idea is that we need to think more about men, about the levels of anger and rage and horniness they experience because of their testosterone. And you are remembering: this is an old story; you have been told this before. Every day something new occurs to you and you feel like you could keep writing this tale forever.

Contributors

Andi Talbot (he/they) is a queer poet and photographer from Newcastle, England. They have released two chapbooks, *Burn Before Reading* (2019) and *Old Wounds//New Skin* (2020), both via Analog Submission Press. They are the co-host of *Choose Poetry Choose Life* Open Mic, and poetry editor for *Periwinkle Lit Mag*. Twitter: @andichrist

Angela Jeffs moved to Japan in 1986 (after 20 years editing books and magazines in London), reinventing herself as a journalist, writer and writing guide. She is now based in Scotland where, as well as leading writing workshops, she is currently writing and curating a collaborative archive-directed diary with students and other writers. She has published three books and is half-way through her memoirs. www.angelajeffs.com

Anissa Praquin is a poet and performer based in Glasgow. They would describe their style as ‘literally anything you might find on the ground at a festival’, and enjoys playing with gender through fashion. They have recently joined the team at Sapphic Writers. Instagram: @chilly_finger

Anna Lindsay lives in Cambridge, where she was adopted by two cats (yes, that way round). She recently rediscovered poetry, and now adores letting her heart sing through her pieces. She's thrilled whenever others delight in those same melodies. Life challenges have shaped recent years, but perhaps honed her words. www.facebook.com/Anna.Lindsay.UK

Camellia Stafford lives in the Midlands and works in museum education. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry Review*, several Emma Press anthologies and Salt's *Best British Poetry 2013*. Camellia's poetry collection *Letters to the Sky* is published by Salt. Twitter/Instagram: @camelliacamille

Cara Hamilton is a professional stage performer whose performances have been rated as ‘one of the top ten things to see’ by *The Times*. She specialises in the arcane and spooky. Working worldwide Cara is a favourite at theatres, national museums and stately homes. www.carahamilton.co.uk

Cecile Durel is a Glasgow-based writer. Her fourth and fifth plays premiered at the 2019 Edinburgh Fringe Festival. She has currently settled in France to complete a musical project, following opportunities as they arise to find inspiration for a next piece of writing. Instagram: @ceciledurel

Christine Foley is an Irish writer with a degree in English Literature from Trinity College Dublin and a Masters' in Creative Writing from Oxford University. She also attended the Curtis Brown Creative Writing School. She runs a fashion blog *Yellow Polka Dot Bikini Blog* but has yet to purchase said swimwear. Instagram: @yellowpolkadotbikiniblog

Christine Fowler was in her 60s when she began focussing on writing and performing poetry in autumn 2019, and has been published in journals and anthologies since 2020. Her poems are informed from a lifetime of experience of working with people in challenging situations. www.christinefowlerpoetry.com

Since childhood **Denise Zygadlo** has treasured garments, recognising the emotional connections we all have with cloth – from the moment we are swaddled to our final windings. Working as a visual artist and performer, cloth has been her focus, through intimate drawings, collage, prints on silk and canvas exploring this relationship. www.denisezygadlo.co.uk

Elizabeth Gibson is a Manchester writer and performer. She won a Northern Writers' Award in 2017, and has been commissioned by Manchester Literature Festival. In 2021, she was chosen for Dibby Theatre's *First Dibs* programme, to bring her spoken-word show – about water, fluidity, queerness, mermaids and geese – to the stage. Twitter and Instagram: @Grizonne

Emma-Jayne Punter is a passionate self-esteem advocate and motivational speaker for women. Her brand *The Girl You Need* spans across a podcast, blog and social media platforms and is aimed at supporting women to feel comfortable and confident in being their true authentic self. www.thegirlyouneed.co.uk

Erin Gannon is a biker chick, poet, and performer whose practice explores the border skirmishes between verse, performance, and music. She holds an MA in Poetry from Queens University and is currently writing a long-form poem / rock opera and is a doctoral candidate in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow.

Fiona Moore's collection *The Distal Point* (HappenStance) was shortlisted for the 2019 TS Eliot and Seamus Heaney prizes. She is on *Magma's* editorial board. She lives in Greenwich but has been staying in the Western Isles since autumn 2019. Twitter: @fioan1

Florence Campbell-Gray is a costume designer, seamstress and writer based in Glasgow. Her work is largely focused on self-analysis through humour and often influenced by Scottish landscapes and culture. She sometimes sings but very quietly and only after dark.

Holly Jackson is a 34 year old writer of poetry and short fiction from County Durham, UK. Her work has appeared in *Fragmented Voices*, *MumWrite*, *Analog Submission Press*, *Periwinkle Lit Mag* and *Poet Versus*. Her debut collection of poetry and short fiction: *Banana and Salted Caramel* is upcoming from Austen Macauley Publishers. Instagram: @hjacksonwrites

Jessica Faith Cooper lives in Edinburgh. She recently completed an MLitt in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow, where she focused on poetry discussing queer expressions of domestic intimacy. Her poems can be found in *Magma Poetry*, *SPAM Zine*, and on *Softshell Radio*. Twitter: @jessicafcooper

Jivan K is a young woman who is curious about the universe. She was born in Wolverhampton but has Panjabi heritage. Having studied Classics at University, she continues to use writing as a form of release after her day at work as an Independent Sexual Violence Advisor. She is a member of the Punjabi Women's Writing Group. Facebook: @PunjabiWomenWriters

Jo Colley is a poet and publisher, with an interest in the digital presentation of text, especially poetry. She makes poetry films and artefacts, blogs about clothes and produces podcasts. Her latest collection, *Sleeper*, was published by Smokestack in February 2020. Twitter: @jocolley

Julia Ruth Smith lives in the south of Italy, where she runs a language school and tries not to forget her own language. She is a mother and loves the sea and being overly-emotional. She has been described as exaggerated. She writes to get all of the above out of her system. facebook.com/julia.r.smith.3

Kate Falvey's work has been published in an eclectic array of journals and anthologies; in a full-length collection, *The Language of Little Girls* (David Robert Books); and in two chapbooks. She edits the *2 Bridges Review*, published through City Tech/CUNY, where she teaches, and is an associate editor for the *Bellevue Literary Review*.

Kate Meyer-Currey was born in 1969 and moved to Devon in 1973. A varied career in frontline settings has fuelled her interest in gritty urbanism, contrasted with a rural upbringing. Her ADHD also instils a sense of 'other' in her life and writing. Her first chapbook *County Lines* will be published later in the year by Dancing Girl Press.

Kate Noakes' most recent collection is *The Filthy Quiet* (Parthian, 2019). She is a PhD student at the University of Reading researching contemporary British and American Poetry. She lives in London and acts as a trustee for writer development organisation, Spread the Word. boomslangpoetry.blogspot.com

Kirsten MacQuarrie is a writer in Glasgow and her work has been published by *New Writing Scotland*, Glasgow Women's Library, the Scottish Poetry Library, *Gutter Magazine* and the Federation of Writers, Scotland. Her first novel is *Ellen and Arbor* and her second will be *The Rowan Tree*. www.glasgowgallerina.com

Indian born **Kuli Kohli** runs the Punjabi Women's Writing Group, and writes for Disability Arts Online. Her poetry pamphlet *Patchwork* (2016) and full poetry collection *A Wonder Woman* (2021) are published by Offa's Press. She has performed in the West Midlands, London, Liverpool, India and the British Museum, and was a guest lecturer at Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany. www.kulikohli.co.uk

Lara Frankena's poems have appeared in *Poetry News*, *PEN International Magazine* and *The Butcher's Dog*.

Lisa Krawczyk (they/them) is a queer poet currently based in the Midwest. Their poetry can be found or forthcoming in *The West Review*, *Vaine Magazine*, *One Art Poetry*, *The Ice Colony*, *Wisconsin Historical Society Press*, and elsewhere. Instagram: [@urbanheatlander](https://www.instagram.com/urbanheatlander)

Lizy Simonen is a Minnesotan writer and librarian in Glasgow. She is happiest when wearing black. Her poetry has appeared in *Uncanny Magazine*. Lizy is set to complete a master's in Creative Writing from the University of Glasgow. Twitter: [@lizysimonen](https://twitter.com/lizysimonen)

Louise Holland is a Scottish writer, currently based in Glasgow. She studied film at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music & Drama and is currently pursuing an MLitt in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow. *Multiple Choice Female* is her first published poem.

Lynn Genevieve originally studied Fashion Design at Art College in 1979. For almost 30 years she has been writing and publishing articles about her life and a second career in midwifery. She is currently studying an MLitt Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow and is focusing on fiction. Lynn won the Dragon's Pen at the Scottish Association of Writers conference 2021. Twitter: [@LynnRSGeneviev1](https://twitter.com/LynnRSGeneviev1)

Margaret Grant is a writer and teacher from Ireland's Southeast. She holds an MA in Creative Writing from Bath Spa University. Her debut novel *Three Eleven* is published by Europe Books and will be in bookshops in May. www.facebook.com/margaret.grant.963

Martha Nye (she/her) is an artist and writer from Perthshire, Scotland. She is currently studying on the Creative Writing MLitt at the University of Glasgow. Her interests include true crime podcasts, veggie lasagne, and small-town gossip. She has work published/forthcoming in *DEAR*, *Spec Books*, and *From Glasgow to Saturn*. Twitter: [@Marthcyne](https://twitter.com/Marthcyne)

Mary Fidler has lived in Japan for nearly 30 years, with her husband Kazz – and a lot of sweaters. As a serial enthusiast she cultivates her creativity on a daily basis bouncing from stitchery to poetry to illustration and whatever else catches her eye. She is endlessly inspired by fashion, style, colour and textiles for the human and the habitat. www.maryfidler

Maud Woolf is a twenty-four-year-old Scottish postgraduate student, with a degree in the lucrative subjects of English and History of Art. An avid sci-fi and horror fan, she spent a year working at a cult comic store, reading all the books she was pretending to re-shelve. She now resides in Glasgow where she is undertaking a master's in creative writing. She aspires to one day own a calico cat. Twitter: [@WoolfWolf](https://twitter.com/WoolfWolf)

Meagan Jennett prefers to wear as few clothes as is reasonably possible, a lifestyle that became a lot harder once she left her hot and humid state of Virginia for Scotland. She's a graduate of the University of Glasgow's MLitt program and a proud horse girl. Twitter: [MisforMaggot](https://twitter.com/MisforMaggot)

Mirrin Hutchison is a Scottish postgraduate student studying for an MLitt in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow after obtaining an MA in English from the University of Aberdeen. Mirrin enjoys exploring perspective in her writing, both poetry and prose, and loves to create haunting narratives/atmospheres with punchy attitudes.

Pam Benjamin is the Owner/Director of Mutiny Radio, bringing free speech and radical self-expression since 2013, from San Francisco to the world, via internet streaming radio and podcasts. She holds an MA in fiction (2010) and MFA in poetry (2012) from SFSU. Pam has been performing stand-up comedy since 2011, and currently runs 5 weekly shows at 4 venues in SF. You can listen to Joke Workshop and Happy Hour on Mutiny Radio. www.mutinyradio.fm

Rebecca Kane is a Scottish poet currently studying English and Art History at the University of Glasgow. She has previously been published in Wild Pressed Books Young Poets' Anthology *Dark Animals*. Her poetry typically discusses ideas related to dissociation, art and the uncanny. Instagram: @r.kpoetry

Ruth Moss is a 40-something writer and mother from Merseyside, UK. Recent work has been published in or is forthcoming from: *Bureau of Complaint*, *Growing Up Vol. 2* (Pure Slush), *Mundane Joys Anthology* (Derailleur Press), *NonBinary Review* and more. Twitter: @marcie_hatter

Ruth Wiggins lives in London, but is happiest when wearing her hiking boots. Her poetry can be found in *Poetry Review*; *POETRY*; *Perverse*; *Blackbox Manifold* and *Stinging Fly*. Her pamphlet *Myrtle* is published by the Emma Press, and her collection *a handful of string* is published by Paekakariki Press. mudpath.wordpress.com

Sarah Furuya lives in a beachtown called Zushi near sacred Kamakura, South of Tokyo. Her career is watching the sky and weaving magic, fun, beauty and stories. She is also a life and executive coach, and runs the biggest clothing swap in Tokyo and tells people's stories through the Legends Podcast. And she's master of magic. www.sarahfuruya.com

Sarah Oba embarked upon an adventure to Japan from the United States, and landed in the fish market district of Tsukiji along the banks of the Sumida River in the days before GPS. She brought an army issue duffle bag stuffed with favourite clothing items - only to find her studio apartment had no closet.

Sarah Smith is a writer from Glasgow whose work has appeared in a variety of journals and anthologies. She has an MLitt in Creative Writing from the University of Glasgow and was a Scottish Book Trust New Writers Awardee in 2019. sarahsmithwriter.wordpress.com

Susie Campbell is studying for a practice-based poetry PhD at Oxford Brookes University. Her poetry has appeared in many poetry magazines, and her recent publications include *I return to you* (London: Sampson Low, 2019), *Tenter* (Cornwall: Guillemot Press, 2020) and forthcoming, *Enclosures* (Osmosis Press, 2021). Twitter: @susiecampbell

Tawnya Selene Renelle is an experimental writer and creative writing educator from the USA. She currently lives in Scotland where she completed her DFA in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow. In May 2019 she published her poetry collection *this exquisite corpse* (Calenture Press), and has had numerous poems and essays published. She recently completed a new poetry collection and an experimental novella. When not writing or teaching, she spends extensive time in the Highlands. www.tawnyaselenerenelle.com

V Churchill explores memoir through poetry and photography, drawing on a mixed media archive of 35 years, it is the power of perspective and the quest for personal transformation that fuel her exploration. In 2014 her first artist book, *I can only experience this through my eyes* was published by bookRoom Press. www.vchurchill.com

