

First
Person.
Feminine



Designed by Ariel Berka
Shenkar College
Mentored by Yossi Katzav
2025



ARIEL BERKA

I'm a fashion designer specializing in natural materials like leather, silk, and wool. My inspiration lies where feminine identity, the female body, and cultural memory intersect.

Through precise tailoring and meticulous craftsmanship, I aim to create garments with quiet presence — pieces that invite reflection, emotion, and personal connection.

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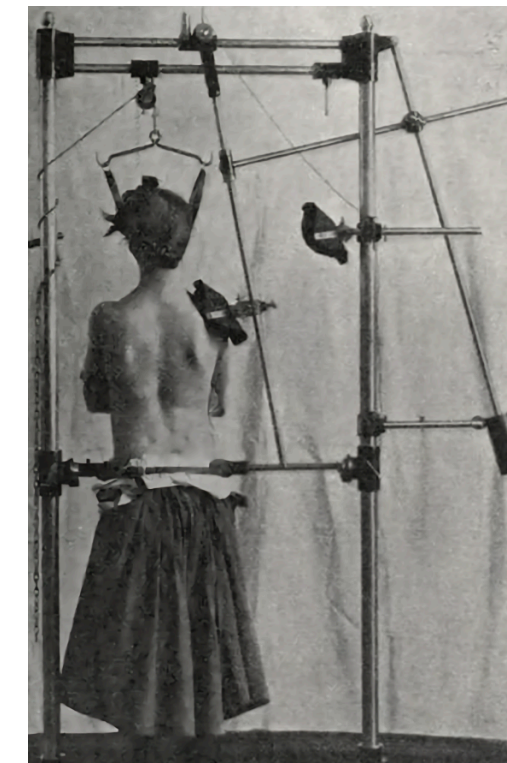
First Person. Feminine

Reclaiming the Female Body

Throughout history, the female body has been a battleground of power, myth, and control. This collection emerged from a profound unease—a fear rooted in the persistent influence of male authority over women’s bodies, a force that echoes across centuries and still reverberates in the present day. At the heart of my inquiry lies one essential question: is a woman’s worth still measured by the capacity of her womb?

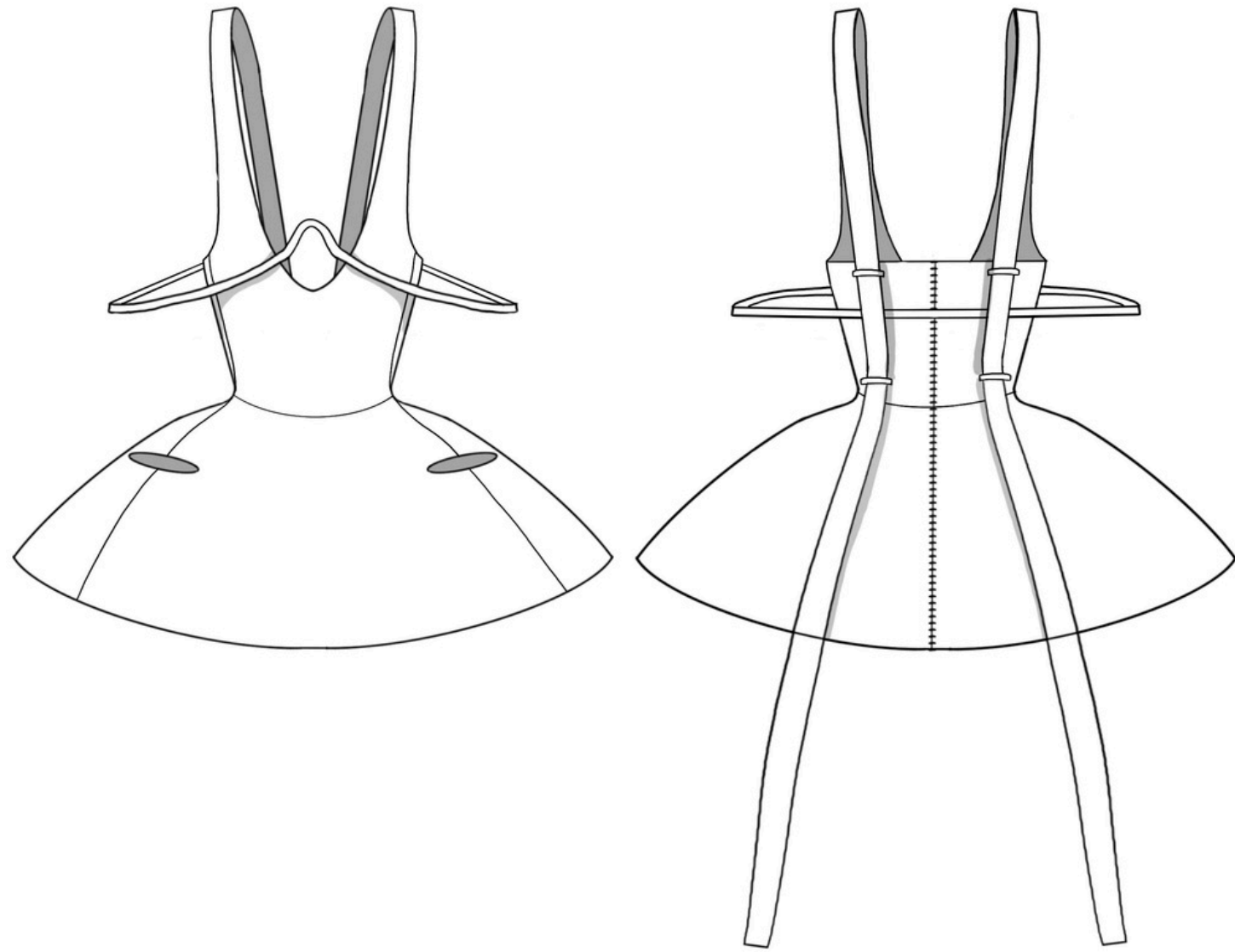
To explore this, I have drawn inspiration from the entwined threads of culture and religion, examining how they have collectively sculpted women’s roles and identities. From the earliest Genesis tales, where female curiosity is met with punishment—pain and childbirth—to the voices of feminist thinkers who have challenged these narratives, this collection seeks to unravel the assumptions that bind womanhood to biology.

I invite you to journey with me as we reconsider the stories we have inherited, confront the legacies we still bear, and imagine a future where the value of a woman is defined not by her body, but by her mind, her spirit, and her freedom.

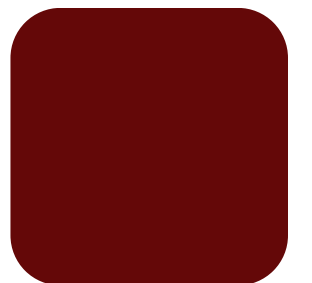


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the IDOL

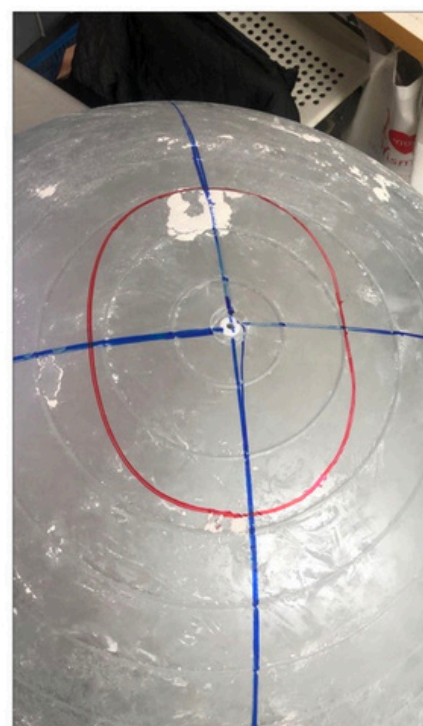


This deep blood-red look, sculpted from rigid vegetal leather, embodies the prison of the feminine ideal. The garment clings to the body like armor — or a cage — with elevated straps that suspend the wearer as if hung on a hanger, reduced to display. A voluminous skirt curves deliberately to emphasize femininity, while the back is sealed shut with pure sterling silver seams, locking the body inside. There's no zipper, no escape — only the image of perfection, constructed and contained. A reflection on how beauty becomes both expectation and entrapment.



the

PROCESS



Leather



VEGETABLE-TANNED
LEATHER



The entire collection is crafted from leather — using a range of types including lambskin, cowhide, and vegetable-tanned leather.

Each material was chosen for its specific qualities: softness, rigidity, texture, and its ability to respond to sculpting and manipulation. Through diverse techniques such as molding, layering, and textural development, the leather transforms in each look — shifting between armor-like stiffness and organic fluidity.

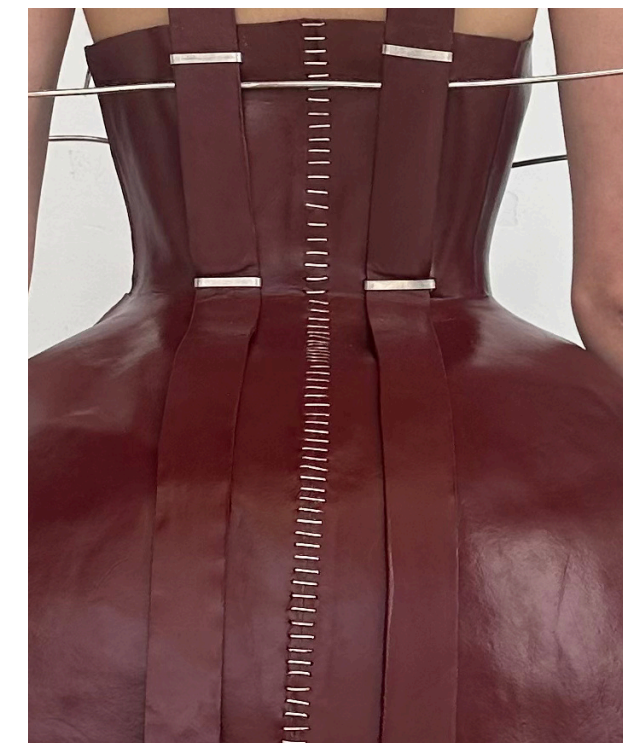
These manipulations allow the leather to take on a new role: not just as a luxurious material, but as a medium that carries tension, memory, and control. Each garment expresses a distinct version of femininity through the language of form, weight, and surface.

Leather becomes both material and metaphor: sculpted, structured, and constrained. The silhouettes echo a time when women were sent back into domesticity, yet their bodies remained on display — managed, adorned, contained. Through sculpted leather, rigid silhouettes, and references to mid-century femininity, I examine how beauty can become a form of control — and how fashion can reclaim space, voice, and presence.

925 SILVER HARDWARE



Sterling silver 925 elements are embedded throughout the collection, becoming an integral part of both form and concept. Handcrafted in response to the collection's themes, these custom silver details — from restrictive belts and IUD-shaped buckles to sealed seams and hanger-inspired closures — reflect the tension between control and autonomy. Their cold, rigid presence contrasts the natural leather and emphasizes the structured, confined silhouette of each piece. Silver, as a precious yet unforgiving material, reinforces the emotional and physical constraints explored in the garments. It becomes a sculptural tool that not only supports the garments technically but echoes the harsh mechanisms through which female bodies have historically been shaped, judged, and silenced.

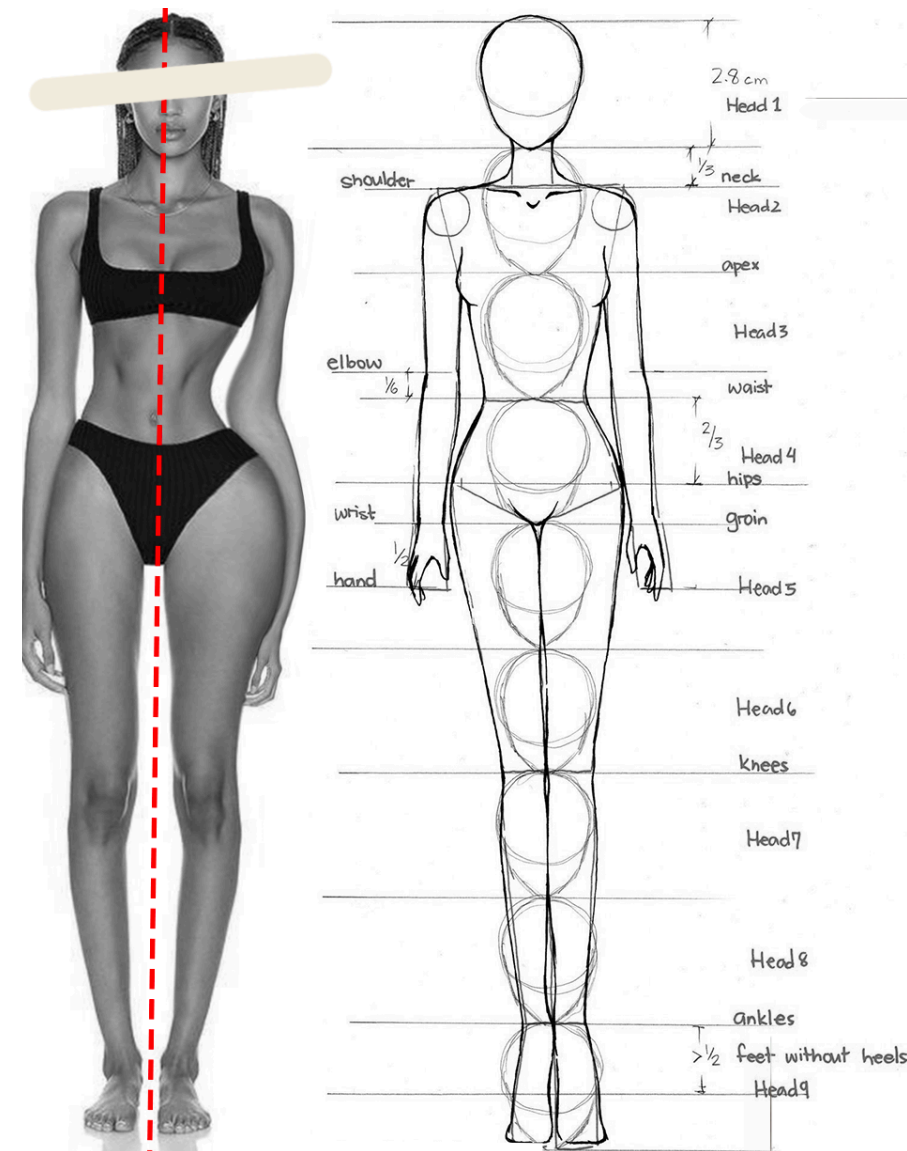


with the use of natural materials like lambskin, cowhide, and vegetable-tanned leather, the silver creates a visual and tactile language rooted in power, protection, and restriction.



the INSPIRATION

Through this collection, I articulate a persistent feeling of estrangement, navigating an industry where my worth is too often tied to reproductive possibility rather than professional prowess. Each garment interrogates the tension between imposed cultural ideals and the reality of the female body: vibrant, sentient, and dynamic. Together, they propose a new visual lexicon—one in which women are valued beyond the boundaries of their physical form.



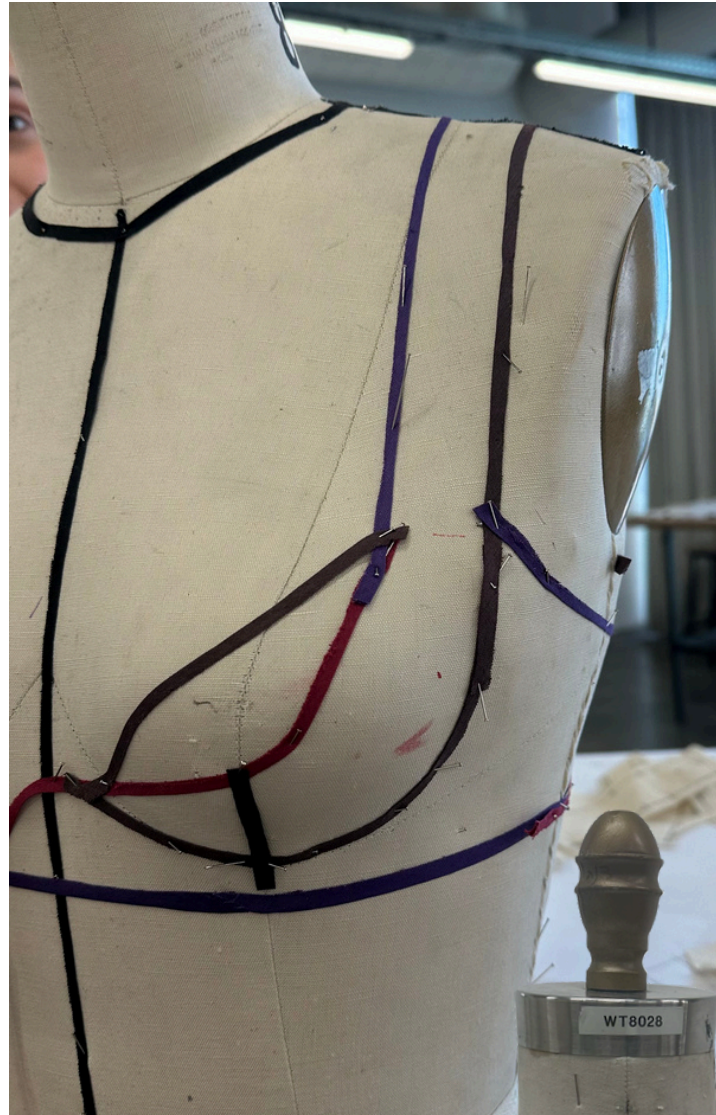
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PINNED, PLEATED, POSITIONED

The silhouettes are inspired by the feminine shapes of the 1950s — a decade when women were pushed back into domestic roles after the war — and pay homage to the ongoing tension between masculine and feminine fashion, and the negotiation of boundaries, roles, and personal space.



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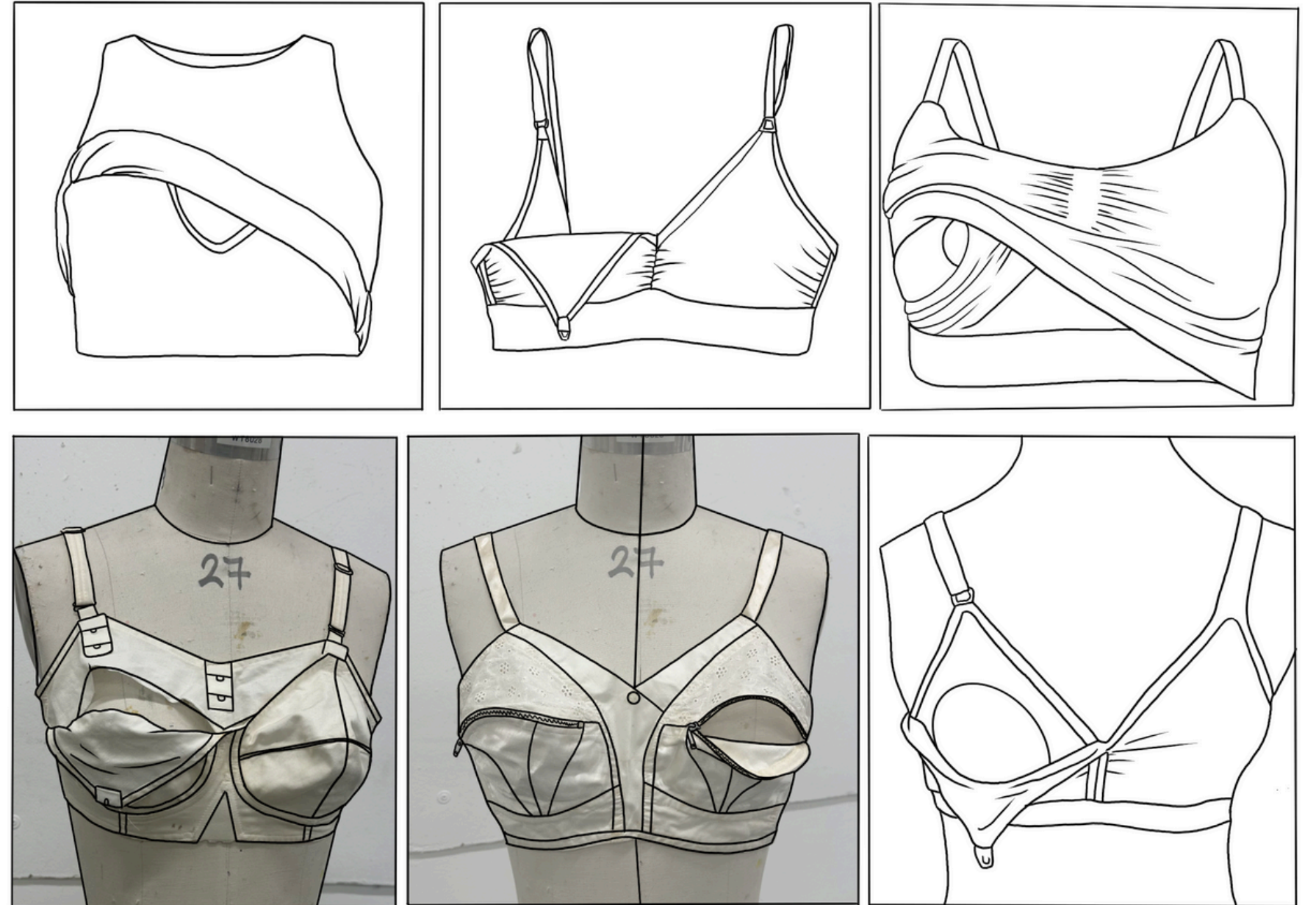


As part of the research, I explored the structure and symbolism of vintage nursing bras — garments designed around access, exposure, and functionality.

I sourced old nursing bras and draped them on the mannequin, sketching directly on the form to understand their construction and the way they frame the body. Their openings, closures, and layered cups reflect not just a technical function, but a cultural one: the woman's body as a vessel, always available, always giving.



MOTHERHOOD AS FUNCTION



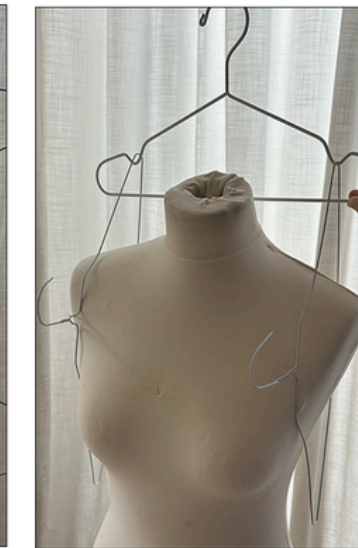
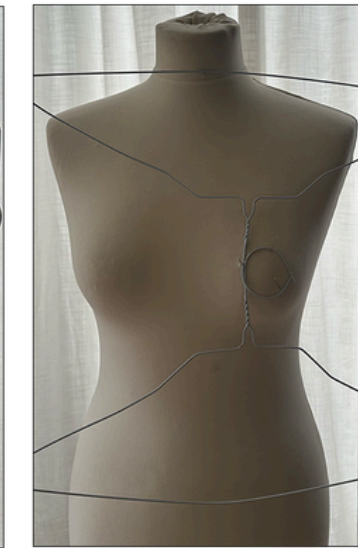
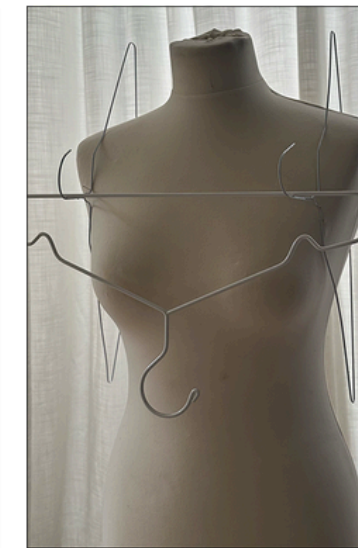
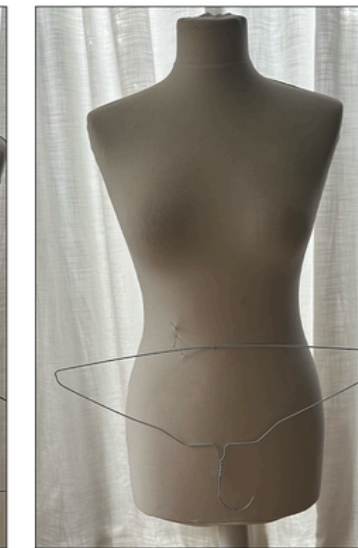
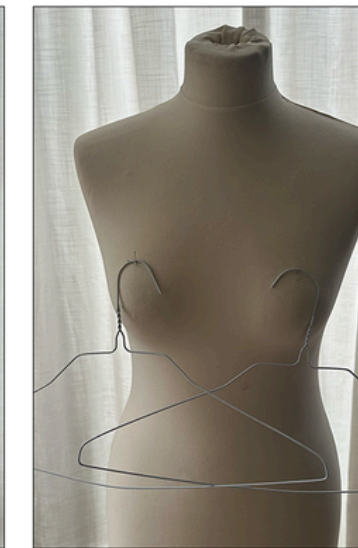
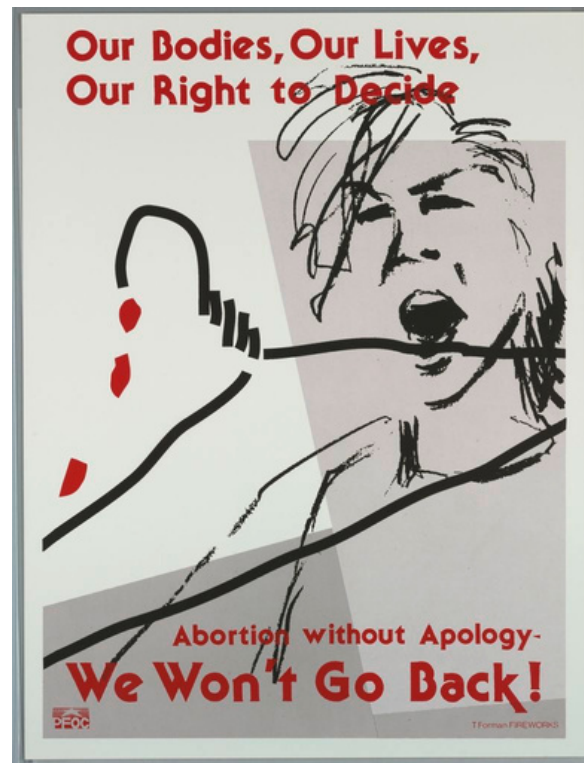
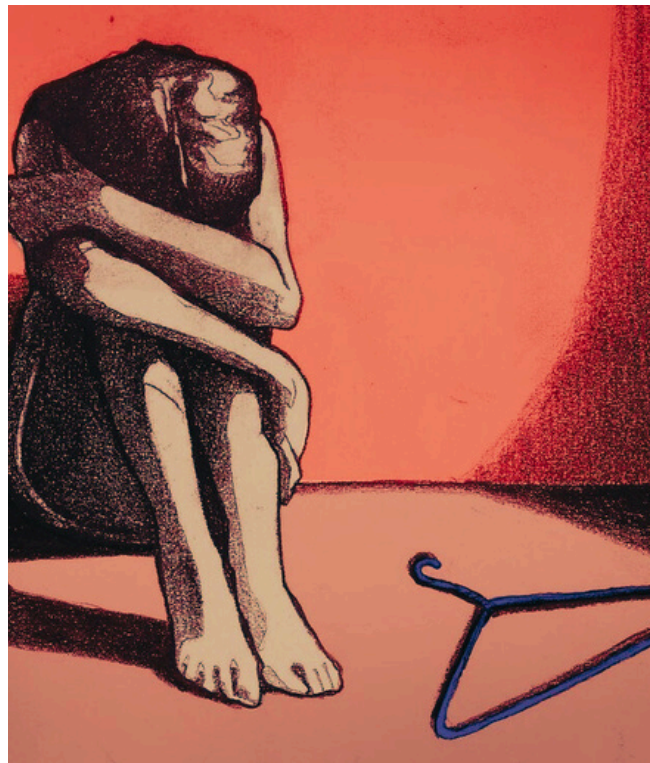
This exploration became a key reference in my collection — a visual and emotional entry point into themes of motherhood, fertility, and the womb. The nursing bra, while intimate and practical, became a symbol of how the body is designed for others — to nourish, to serve, to comply.

By studying and reinterpreting it, I aimed to reclaim its language — not to serve, but to speak.

HUNG

As a fashion designer, the hanger is part of my daily routine — a simple, practical tool used to carry, hold, and display garments. But historically, the hanger has also carried a much darker meaning.

Before abortion was legalized in the 1960s, hangers were infamously used in unsafe, illegal abortion attempts. What was once a symbol of domestic order became a symbol of desperation — of women forced to risk their lives for the right to control their bodies.



This duality struck me deeply. The same object that supports my work as a designer also represents the violent history of denied autonomy. In this collection, the hanger becomes a silent reference — a reminder that tools of creation and destruction often live side by side.

This historical cycle — of gaining, then losing, control — forms the backdrop of the collection. It is not just about aesthetics. It is about the body as a site of protest, of memory, and of power



1969

The fight for abortion rights is not new — it echoes across decades, repeating itself in waves of protest and resistance.

In the 1960s, women took to the streets demanding control over their own bodies. Their voices led to the first legalizations of abortion in the Western world — a breakthrough that marked bodily autonomy as a fundamental right.

Today, that same right is under attack. In the United States, the overturning of Roe v. Wade has reignited a battle we thought had already been won. Fourteen states have already banned abortion, dragging us back to a time when women's choices were not their own.



2025

Abortion

CHOICE

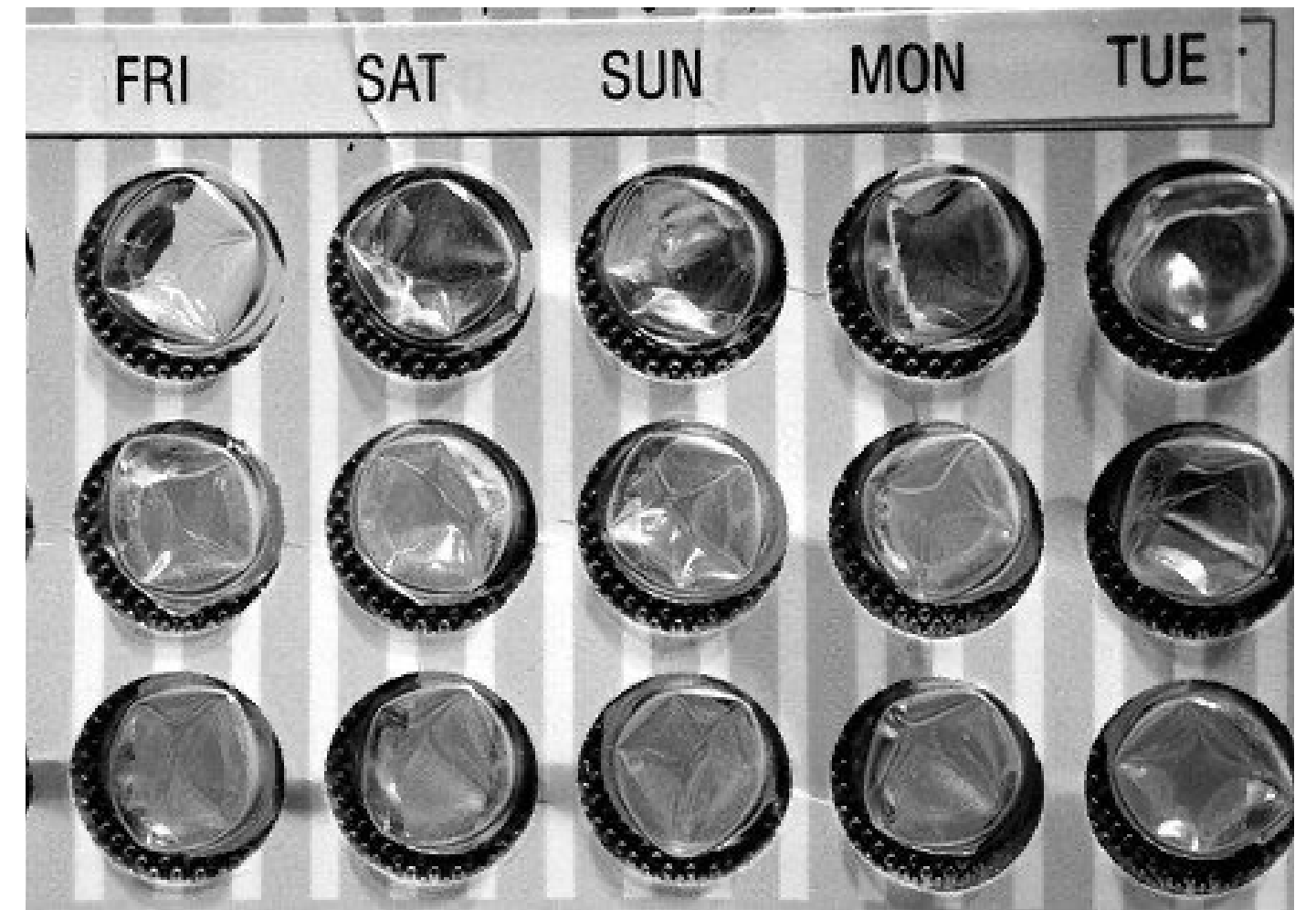
Inside Out



The IUD — a small medical device inserted into the uterus — became a powerful symbol in my design process.

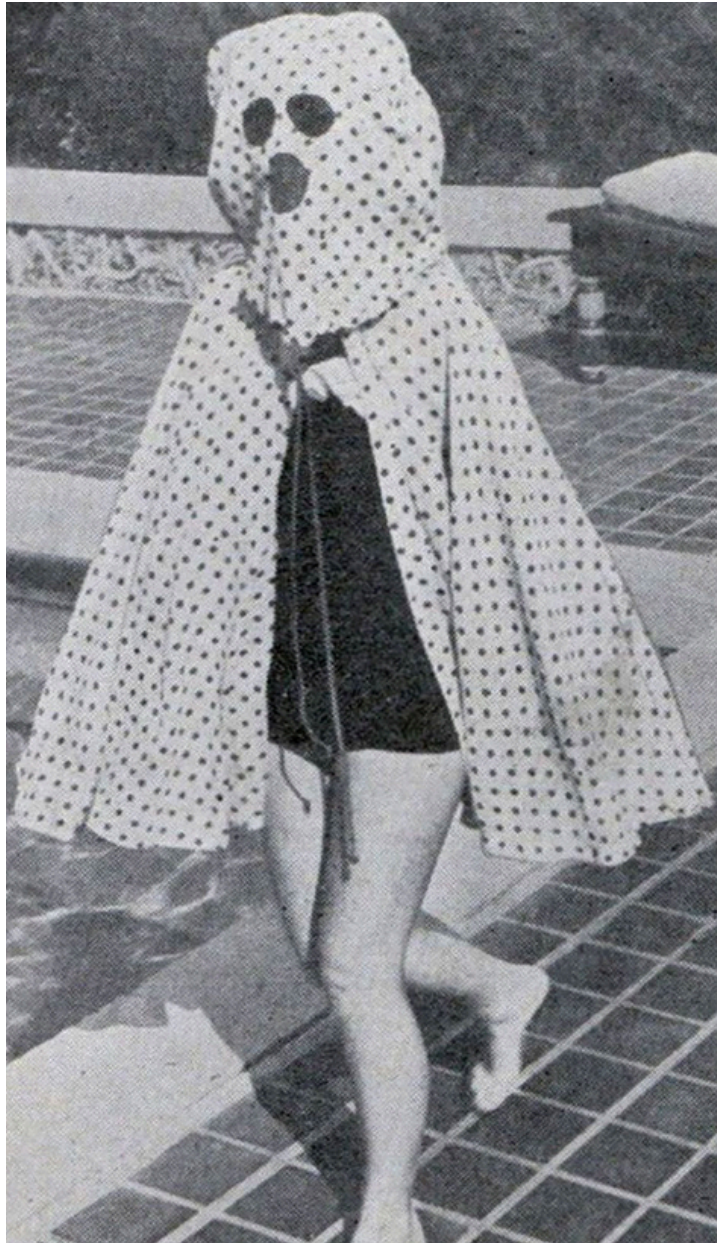
Used to prevent pregnancy, it holds a dual meaning: it is both a tool of control and a form of empowerment. It represents the right to choose, to plan, to decide when and whether to become a mother — a freedom not granted to women throughout much of history.

the IUD earrings - 925 silver



I was drawn to its sharp geometry and quiet symbolism — something invisible yet deeply political. I reimagined the IUD as both an earring and a bra clasp, crafted in sterling silver. By placing it on the outside of the body, I gave visibility to what is often hidden — turning a private, internal object into a bold expression of autonomy.

This act of design reclaims a form historically associated with regulation, and reframes it as a declaration of ownership, strength, and choice.



The tension between covering and revealing the female body has long served as a tool of control — whether in the name of modesty or display.

This collection draws inspiration from both conservative historical dress and unsettling imagery from 1960s beauty pageants, where women appeared in swimsuits with their faces veiled or obscured. The result was striking: hyper-visible bodies paired with erased identities — the ultimate objectification. I looked closely at archival garments such as ceremonial veils and modesty coverings, studying how they shaped presence and absence. The juxtaposition of exposed skin and hidden expression became a central visual and conceptual motif in my work — raising the question: What does it mean to be seen, but not recognized?

THE POLITICS OF EXPOSURE



Through these references, I explored how the female body has been positioned between visibility and erasure — celebrated as an object, silenced as a person.