

Angela Last
MA Fashion

mutation

"To banish imperfection is to destroy expression."

John Ruskin

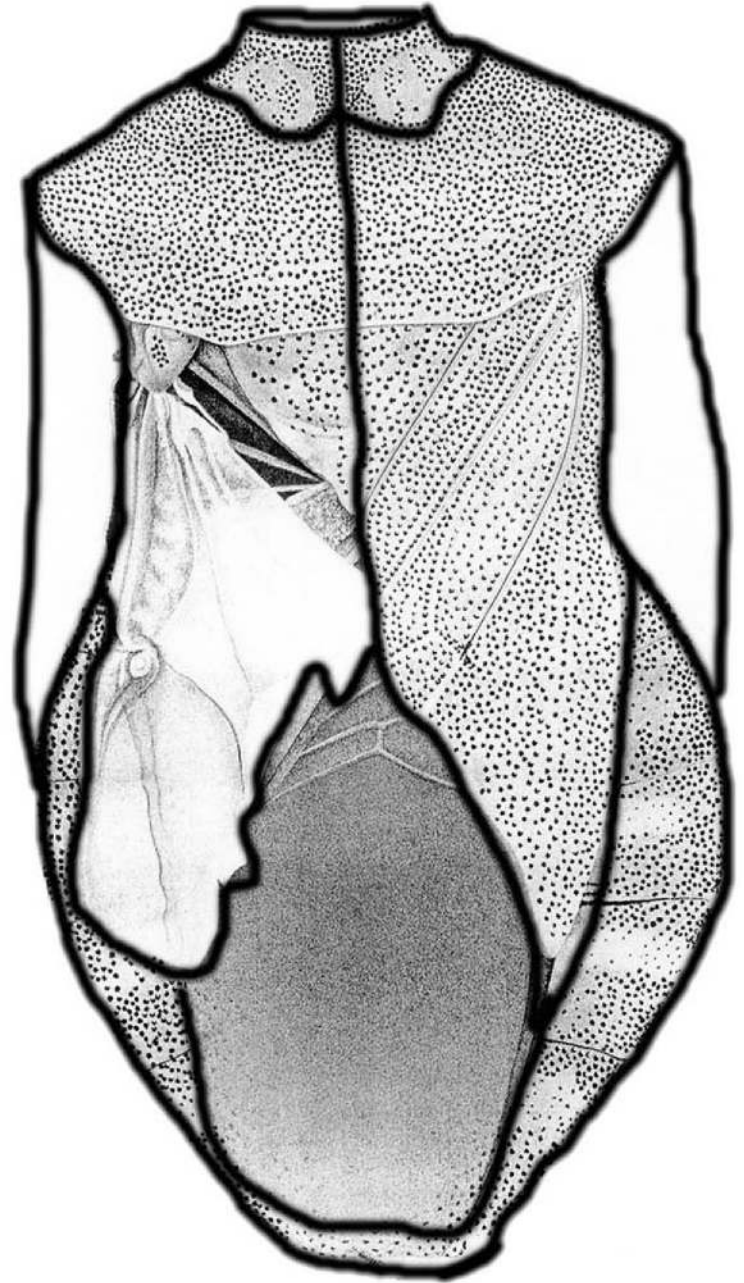
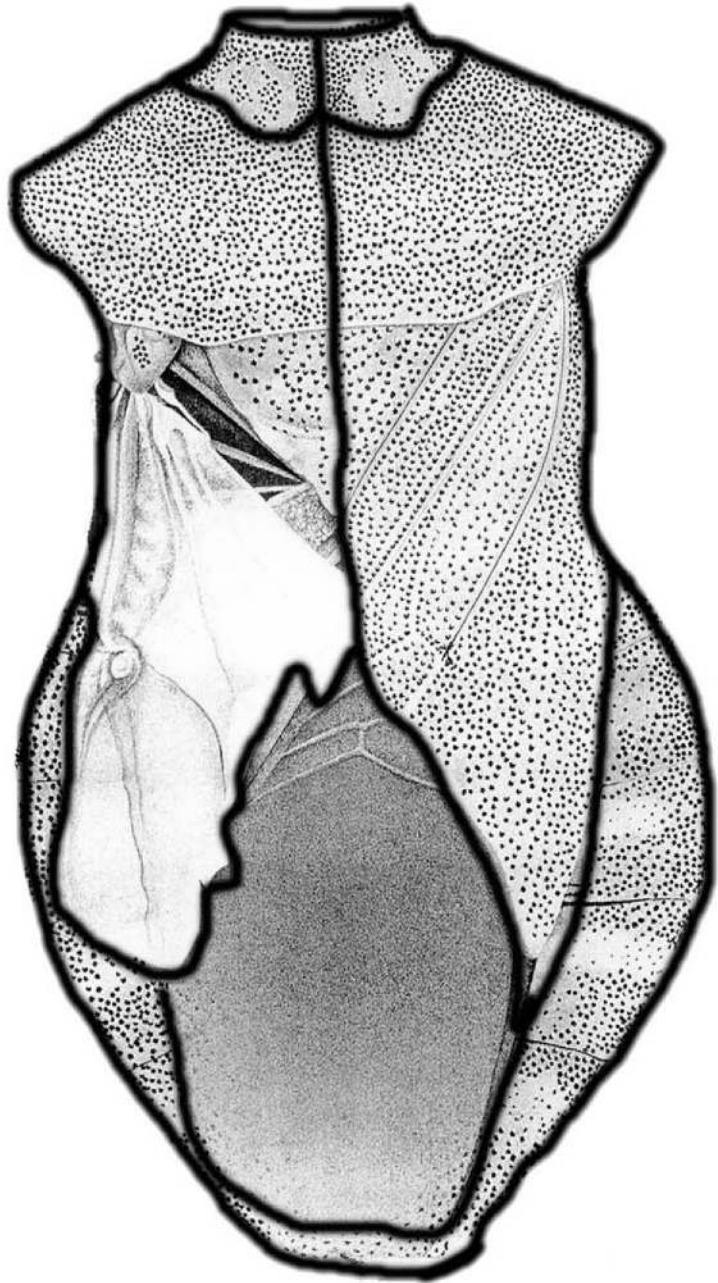
"I think perfection is ugly ...

Perfection is a kind of order

that one forces onto something."

Yohji Yamamoto

Cover image: inverted drawing from
Cornelia Hesse-Honegger
"The Future's Mirror", 1997.





mutation

is an interactive project examining ideas of nature and perfection. It is the result of my research into concepts of sustainability - a life-style that seeks to meet the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations - and into understandings of terms such as 'organic' and 'ecological'. mutation is a reaction to the desire for a more ecological life-style that a growing number of consumers are expressing. The intention of 'mutation' is to present ideas, to involve people, to communicate, to exchange.

During my previous project I became interested in the contradictory, but co-existing images we have about nature: we tend to discriminate between a malevolent ('dirt') and a benevolent ('supernatural') nature. mutation is based on the idea that many of the environmental problems we experience have been created by wanting to control or erase perceived imperfections of nature (the "dirt") and by pursuing a restricted ideal of "surface" perfection while failing to examine how this perfection is achieved. An example of this is monoculture which seeks to produce a regulated supply of ideally identical crops.

The project abandons the approach of looking at the ecological implications of production and use, and instead enlists already existing goods, in this case clothes, as a medium to engage with issues of perfection and imperfection. This way mutation aims to give visibility to the origin of the problem rather than present a production-oriented solution.



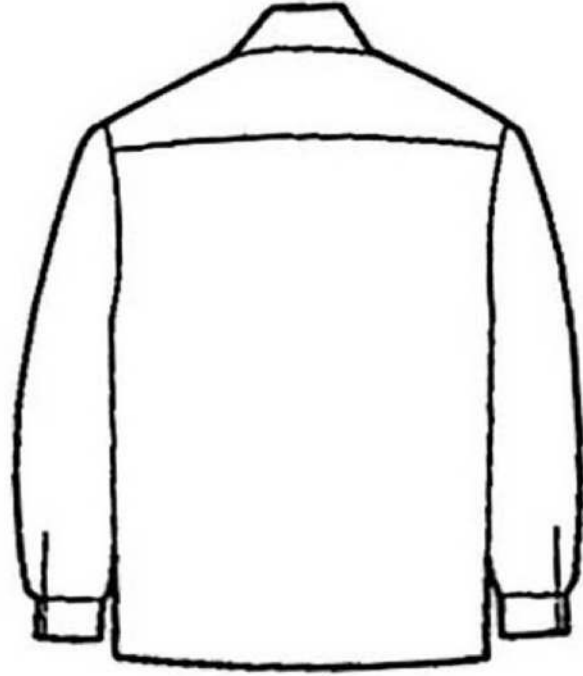
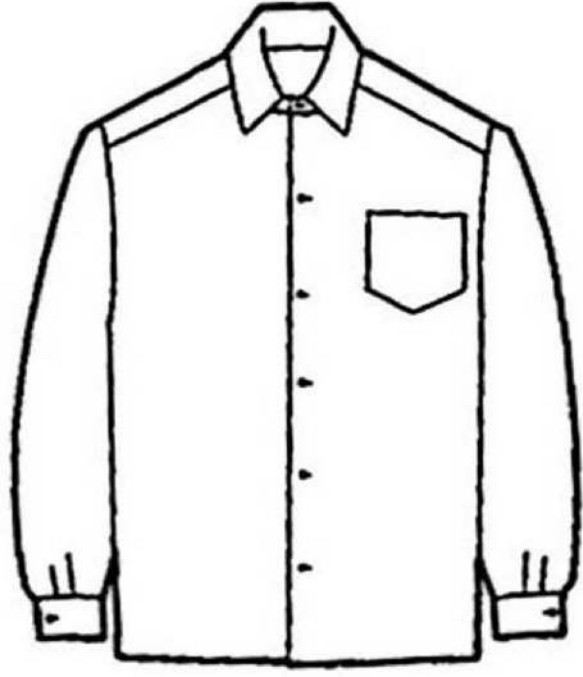


The project is called mutation because of the images and associations the word triggers. In its technical form, mutation occurs when DNA is not copied in the exact way. Mutation is about change. In a wider sense, mutation is about an organism's ability to adapt, about survival or failure to survive. Mutation is what links us to everything else that is "organic", but has separated us from it as well. Mutation is about perfection/imperfection. Mutation creates flaws, but also improvements - a theme frequently explored in science fiction. Mutation is about order and fear of disorder, about our wish to control random events. Plant and genetic engineering are examples of attempts to 'improve nature' or control the unknown. Mutation is also site of controversy where our views on nature clash.

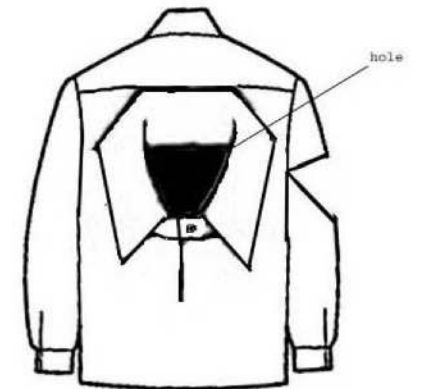
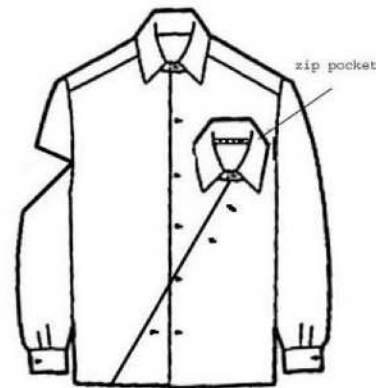
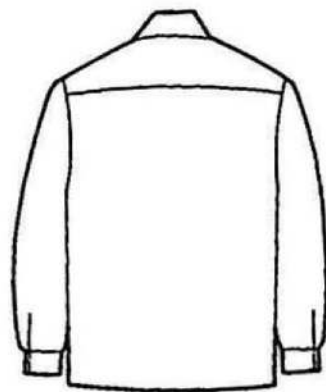
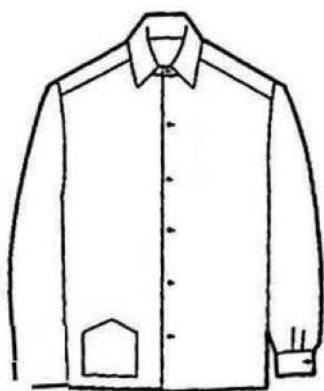
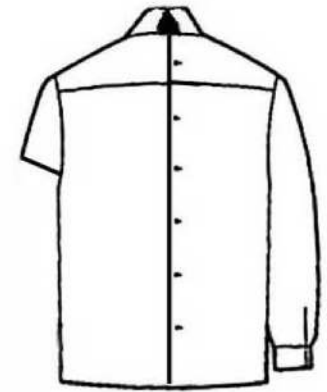
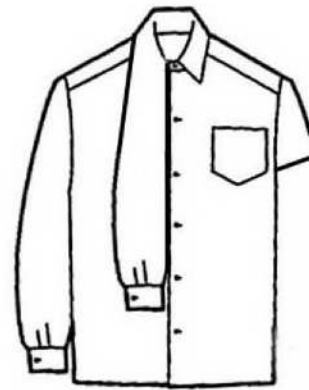
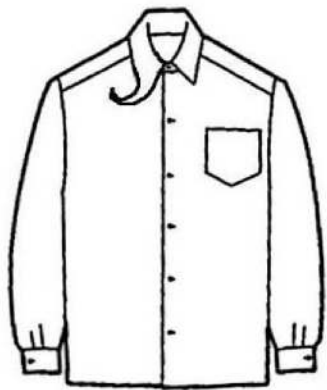
In this project, mutation is seen as occurring around us all the time - not only in cells or laboratories, but through events that change us. If, for instance, you substitute "routine" for "DNA-copying" and "little strange things happening" instead of "mutations", you have a similar kind of process: if something extraordinary ('imperfect') happens, something out of the ordinary, people have to react to it. This can have either a positive or a negative effect. Take some letters fallen off a shop sign which now give a funny meaning. Or an underground maintenance that forces you to alter your way to work: you may end up stressed, late and soaking wet from the rain - but you also may discover an interesting area you otherwise would not have noticed before and start to frequent.

Sometimes an event can change a person. Sometimes an event just gives a person a little pleasure, if only for a short while, but it will stay with that person. Sometimes an event provokes questions. To me these questions are: what if everything was orderly and 'perfect'? Would it really be 'perfect' or do we need these 'imperfections'?

We also have to ask ourselves: to what degree do we want or need imperfections? And: are we prepared to consciously allow or even desire these imperfections?



mutation 1



Examples

Patricia Alvarez

mutation 1

In mutation 1 imperfections are created artificially by 'mutating' existing garments. Garments are the most visible personal sites through which we can express ourselves, our desired image and our ideas.

John Harvey writes "clothing articulates a political will". It could be argued that this sentence should read 'can articulate a political will'. mutation 1 uses this idea to give visibility to the desire for a more sustainable life-style.

In the project garments are used to convey messages to other people. However, the aim of mutation is not to impose the wearer's views but to create dialogue. Changing garments in a distinct way draws attention to the 'imperfection' and provokes questions, especially as the purpose of clothes is often perceived as being about hiding imperfection. At some point the wearers of the garment are likely to be asked questions about the 'mutation' and can reply with their story. The other person may then be provoked to offer an account of their relationship with imperfection in return.

mutation1 uses mass-produced white shirts as a symbol of perfection/DNA-copying/control. The deliberately imperfect alterations become a sign of being comfortable with imperfection, and, in the wider context, the perceived imperfections of nature. Knowing the background of the project, the makers of the 'mutations' are making statements about the degree to which they want to see their environment regulated.





The process

- to explain the project to participants
- to let people chose one of the white shirts provided
- to wait for the participant to decide on a "mutation"
- to help people realise their mutation
- to share stories during the creation of the 'mutation'

mutation 1 allowed me to exchange views with many different people and this has resulted in valuable feedback, discussions and ideas for other projects. Sometimes a session did not result in the production of a 'mutation' but led to an opinion exchange - or the exchange of a photograph or photocopy of related material. Sometimes the briefs were forwarded to and discussed by different local environmental groups or posted onto their message boards. All of these dispersals contributed to the aim of the project

mutation 1 was presented as an interactive installation. The installation contains a written explanation, a sewing machine, a pile of unaltered white shirts and a 'mutation kit' containing bits and pieces that may be used for the desired alterations. An empty space on a rail or empty hangers on a wall stand for mutations still to come, the finished 'mutations' that are exhibited showing only the beginning or examples rather than the end-result. The most important component, however, are the people passing on and exchanging stories.

The process of mutation 1 has led to the idea of mutation 2 (please refer to the back of this booklet). There may be more versions to come - as the title suggests mutation is not intended to be static...

Stephen J. Turner
"Fruitfly Mutation"



David Kirkham
"Ageing"



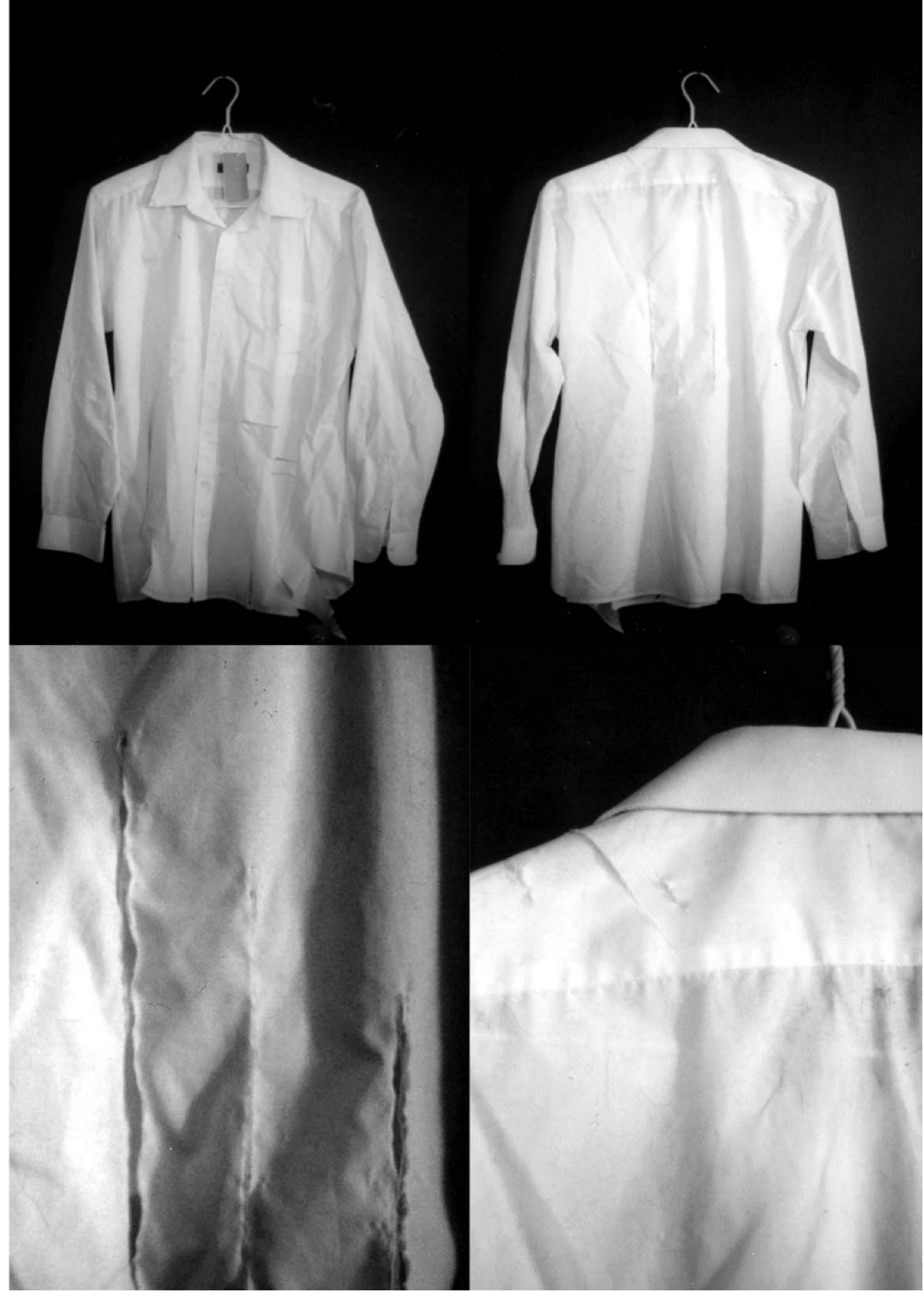
Chris Stutley
"Scars"



Patricia Alvarez
"Why not?"



Sarah Harrison
"When Cats Attack"



Maria Kalathaki
"Wearable Garden"



Sandra Imelmann
"Dead End"



Brigitte Last
"Mutable Shirt"



Chris Brecken
"Holes"



Matt Nixon
"Frankenstein Monster"



Dave Harrison & Stuart Murray
"Struck by Lightning"



mutation 2

A room is fitted with three clothing rails.
On the first one there are three grey jackets.
At a first glance they all look the same,
however, on a closer inspection
they all prove to be different.
The first one is the 'master garment'.

The room also contains a computer on a table,
a printer, a tray and a seat.
The screen shows the technical drawing
of the 'master' jacket
as well as an invitation to the person
looking at the screen to manipulate the pattern.

The people wishing to participate are asked
to type in their name, contact number or e-mail address
and then are asked to change one thing in the pattern.
Once they have changed the pattern
they can save it, print it out and leave it
in a tray next to the computer.

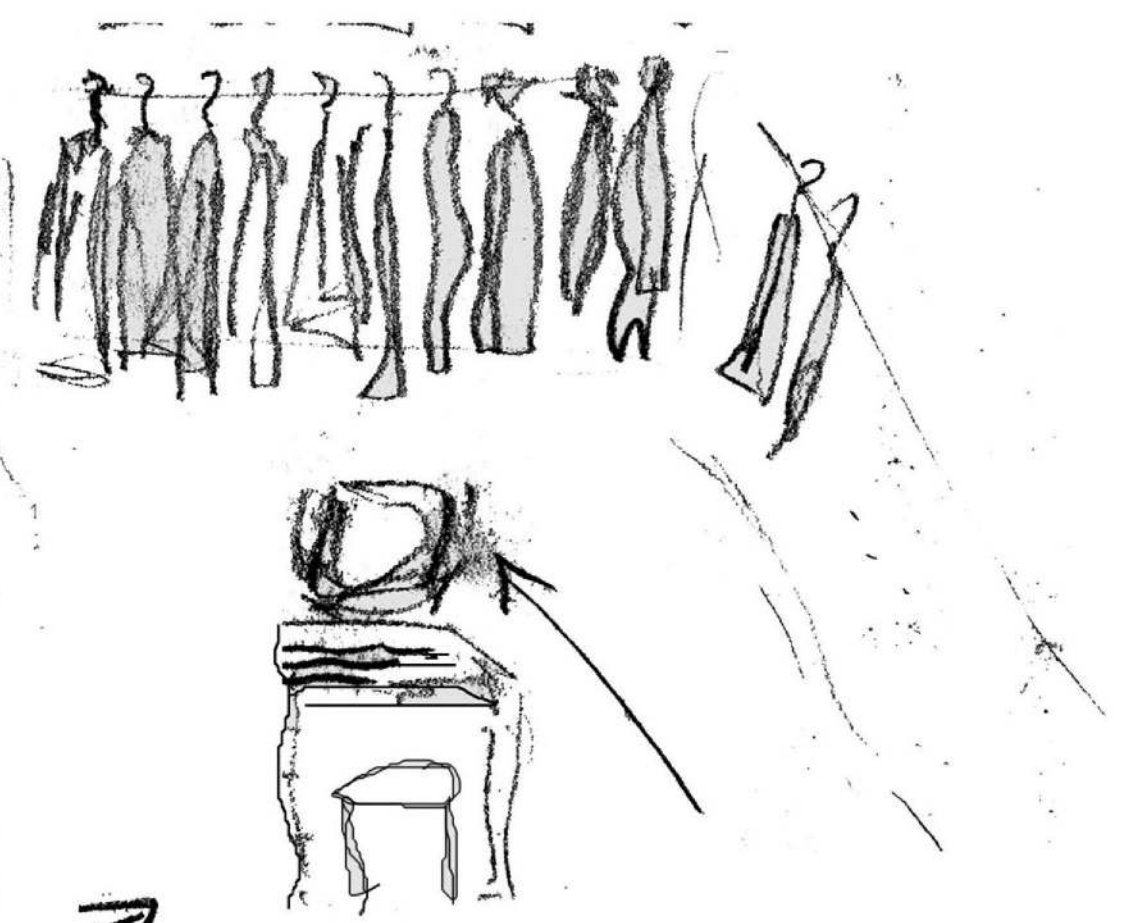
The alterations will then be applied
to the master pattern and new jackets will be made
from them to be added to the rail.
In the end the rails will be filled with grey jackets,
all looking the same from a distance,
but every single one is different and "imperfect".



Wall with
grey
blazers

to be filled
during exhibition

chair +
table with
computer





Thanks to

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