

SHE SHELLS

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Throughout human history, people have identified themselves in seashells, establishing the curious objects with value, mystery, and timelessness. Seashells are liminal objects, existing between life and death and originating from both the earth and the heavens. This woven textile collection celebrates the majestic forms of seashells, their materiality, and natural origins. The design's juxtapositions of hard and soft, rough and smooth, matte and iridescent, and dense and airy speak to this terrestrial and celestial threshold. A seashell's power reaches inside the soul and outside the mind, influencing the workings of both the physical world and the metaphysical realm.

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Seven female archetypes were conceived to represent themes of fertility, sexuality, pursuit, imagination, architecture, death, and the afterlife. Seven silhouettes were designed beforehand to inform each textile's three-dimensionality, which is fundamental to capturing the essence of seashells. They tell the story of the relationship between seashells and humanity, highlighting the characteristics of shells that echo the human experience and impact the human world.



SHE SHELLS



tidal red

bone grey

tyrian purple

heavenly pearl



sea star violet

cosmic cream

slipper shell pink

soft sand

sea rose



driftwood

abalone silver

ammonite brown

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the CREATOR



She is the ultimate mother and giver of life.
She is nurturing and protective. She is love,
grace, and warmth.

Seashells are often linked to the concept of fertility. They contain and protect valuable objects, such as pearls, which can be interpreted as symbols of the womb and fetus. Medieval Europeans believed that pearls were created when a mollusk became pregnant after opening its shell to receive a “heavenly” dew. The term “Pearl Mother” or “Mother-of-pearl” stems from this idea. Medieval Christians used it as an allegory for the conception of Christ when Mary was impregnated.



the CREATOR



Creation stories of both the earth and mythical gods and creatures often include seashells. As far back as 400 BCE, Aphrodite, the sea-born goddess of love and beauty, has been depicted emerging from a scallop shell at her conception. These fabric designs use scallop shell imagery in both pattern and shape to form a mother figure. The gathered pleats referencing the ribs of a scallop, fan out into the encompassing shape of the womb; the dense yet feminine fabric mimics the smooth, protective surface of the shell and motherhood.



the LOVER



She is the seductress and ruler of senses. She is beauty, lust, and desire. She is intentional and complex.

The shell's likeness to human body parts can be identified in the ears, eyes, brain, breasts, belly button, and most commonly, the sexual organs. Seashells' connection to sexuality goes beyond their resemblance to genitalia, to their aphrodisiac powers and soothing touch. Their smooth, luminous surfaces are reminiscent of porcelain and human skin, aligning with beauty standards in Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries.



the LOVER



The juxtaposition of hard and soft materials in shells, along with their vibrant colors and elegant curvature, tells a story of human love and desire. They tempt all human senses: sight, touch, smell, taste, and even sound, which come together in an amplified and heightened sensual interaction with the object. These designs look to interpret the soft, hard, sheen, subtle, and complex characteristics of seashells, which link them to themes of sexuality, sensory, and desire.



She is the huntress and explorer. She is adventurous, powerful, and thoughtful. She represents pursuit, discovery, and knowledge.

Shells have played a significant role in human history, influencing aspects such as colonialism, slavery, commercialism, scientific discovery, art movements, and interpersonal relationships. A shell-collecting boom during the 16th and 17th centuries introduced new and “exotic” natural objects to Europeans who used them to flaunt their wealth, pursue scientific research, and exploit people of color. The scientific field of Conchology, the study of mollusks, emerged from this shell-collecting boom.



In addition to having a massive global impact, seashells move people on an individual level, holding personal or cultural significance. Once washed ashore and picked up, shells become active in the human world, “never to be filled with anything other than human thought” (Helen Grootenboer). These designs aim to represent this idea through their references to the waves that deliver the shells into human hands and the tracks left behind, inevitably marking the beginning of the shell’s journey to impact history both globally and individually.



the ENCHANTER

She is a mermaid, a mysterious and tempting creature. She is magical and hails from faraway realms. She is bewitching, seductive, and as dangerous as she is beautiful.

Like the seashell, mermaids can conjure up fantastical worlds and stories rooted in their underwater origins. Through Medieval Christianity, mermaids became personifications of sin. Their images were used to shock and disturb parishioners or congregants, encouraging ideas that nudity, loose hair, and vanity were evil and that women were especially susceptible to this “demonic” behavior.



the ENCHANTER

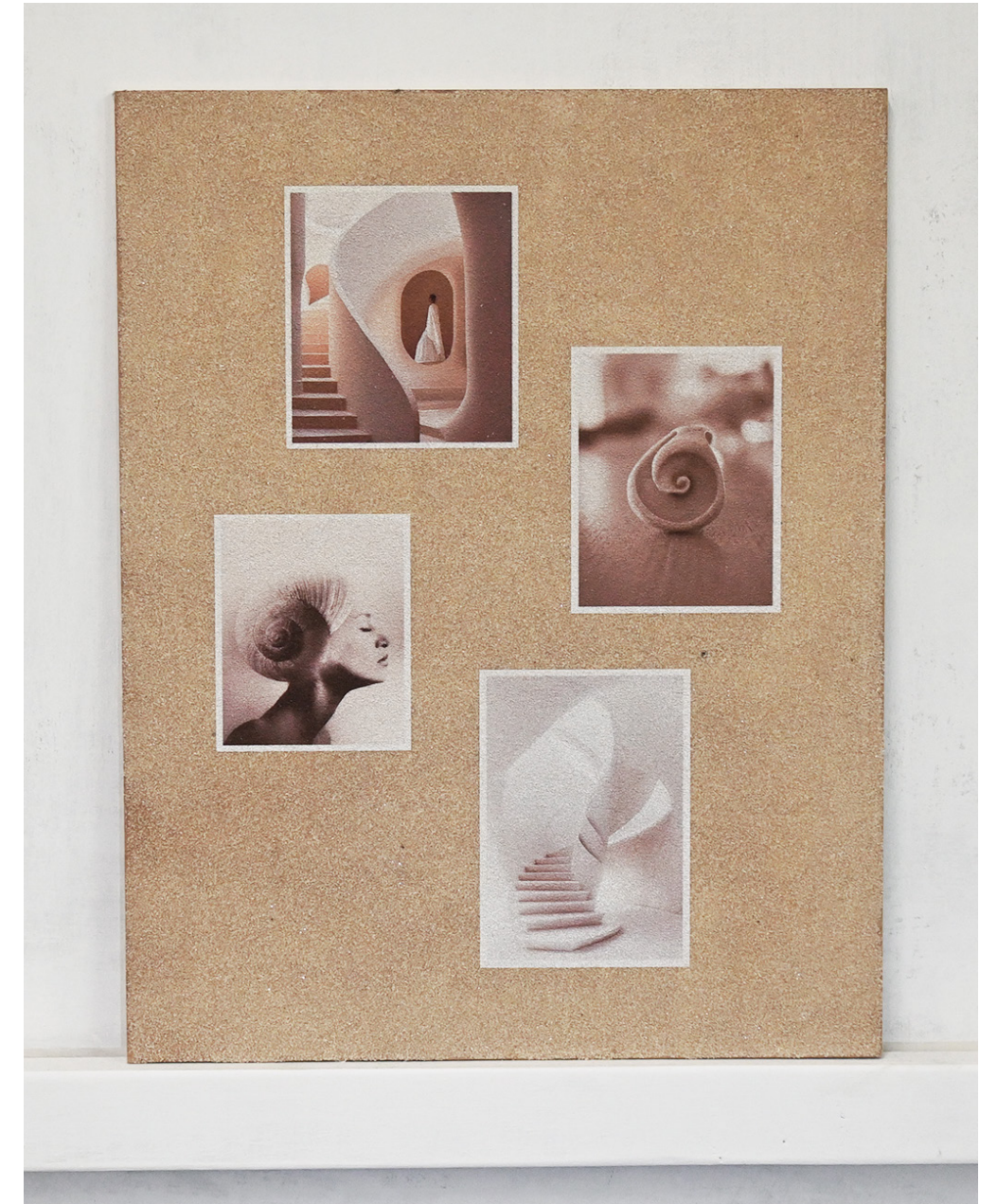
This design plays on this theme through its unconventional material and reference to the contemporary, yet controversial, naked-dress trend. The cage-like appearance of the corset is a metaphor for the religious and social framework that stigmatized women through the lens of mermaids. The wire material, strong and sharp, indicates the dangers and fears surrounding mermaids, and the negative space represents their seductive traits.



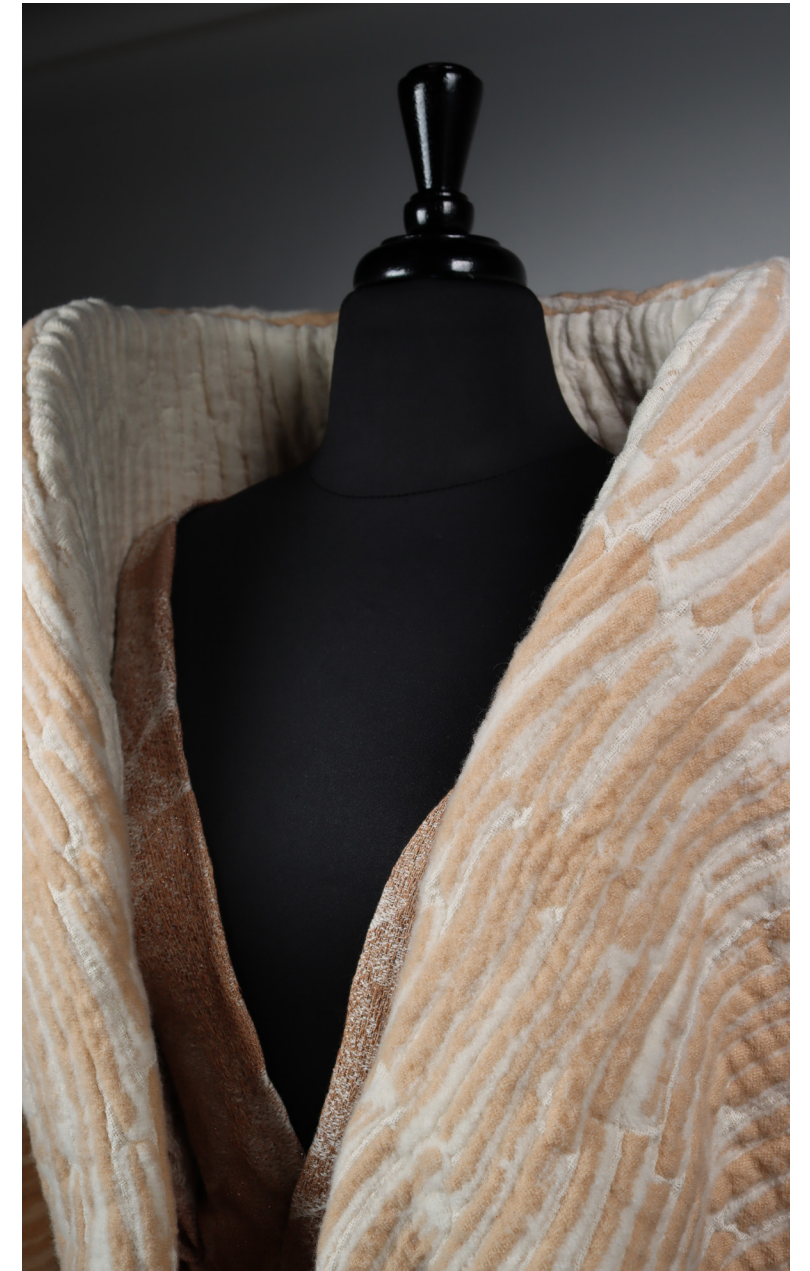
the BUILDER

She is the homemaker and architect. She provides a protective enclosure and an intimate setting. She is sensible, supportive, and private.

Seashells function similarly to architecture; their makers, mollusks, can be considered human-like in their natural capacity to design and build their own homes. The shell's layers are built over the life span of the mollusk, adding to its home to accommodate its expanding life.



The Renaissance passion for spiral staircases often directly references seashells by referring to them as “snail staircases.” Leonardo da Vinci named his double-helix staircase “double-snail,” and the Wentletrap shell’s scientific name literally translates to “spiral stairs.” This coat uses the protective, private enclosures inspired by shells to inform its shape and materiality, while Leonardo da Vinci’s spirals inspired the coordinating textile.



the REAPER

She is the collector and harvester of souls. She is perilous, dreadful, and inevitable. She is danger and death.

The design of the veil references fishing nets, the tool that harvests many ocean animals, and the dangers that often befall the harvesters. Work associated with the sea, including shell, pearl, and coral fishers, has always been plagued by danger and fear of death. Early Modern Europe's high demand for shells, pearls, and coral put many lives at risk, especially those of foreign people.



the REAPER



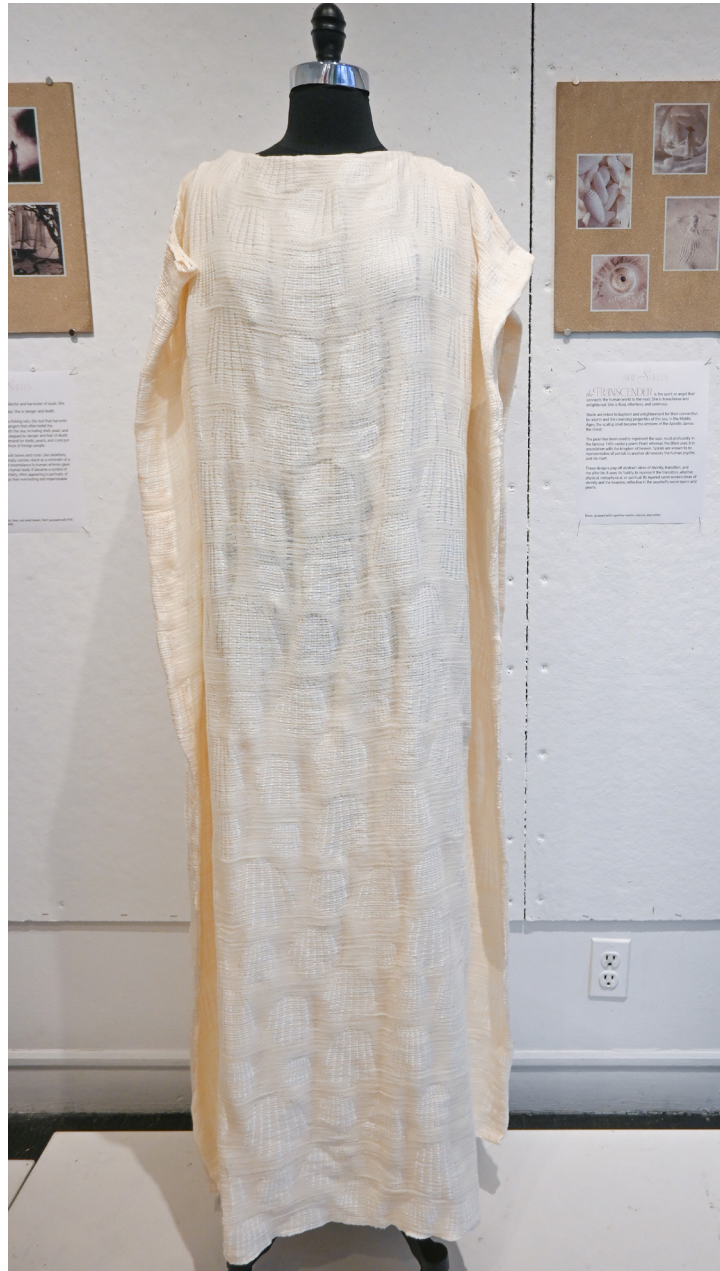
The skirt design references both bones and coral. Like skeletons, seashells' nature and eerie empty cavities stand as a reminder of a life lost. Coral's red color and resemblance to human arteries gave it a strong connection to the human body. It became a symbol of bodily protection and immortality, often appearing in portraits of Jesus and Mary to symbolize their everlasting and imperishable bodies.



the TRANSCENDER

She is the spirit or angel that connects the human world to the next. She is transitional and enlightened. She is fluid, effortless, and luminous.

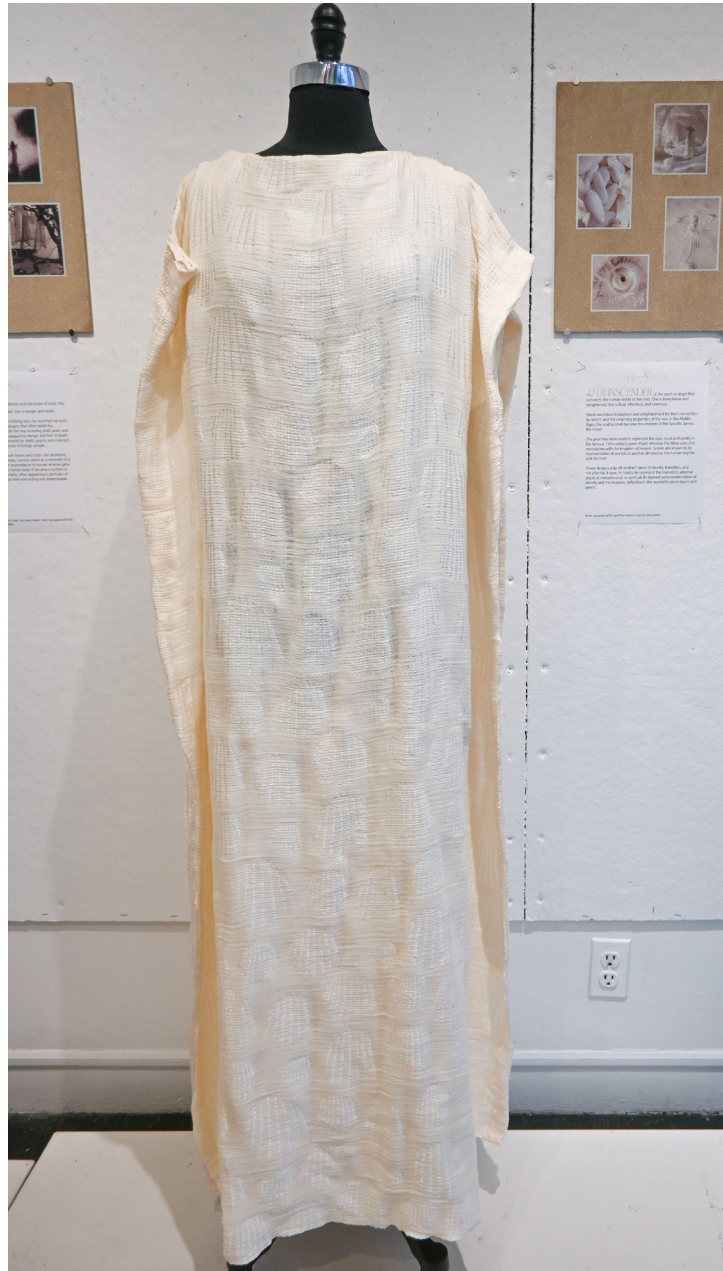
Shells are linked to baptism and enlightenment for their connection to rebirth and the cleansing properties of the sea. In the Middle Ages, the scallop shell became the emblem of the Apostle James the Great.



the TRANSCENDER

The pearl has been used to represent the soul, most profoundly in the famous 14th-century poem *Pearl*, whereas the Bible uses it in association with the kingdom of heaven. Spirals are known to be representative of portals to another dimension, the human psyche, and life itself.

These designs play off abstract ideas of divinity, transition, and the afterlife. It uses its fluidity to represent the transition, whether physical, metaphysical, or spiritual. Its layered luster evokes ideas of divinity and the heavens, reflective in the seashell's nacre layers and pearls.



The End

