

she carries her own bag



By Gabby Polesy

**TO EXIST
COMFORTBLY IN
A WORLD THAT
DIDN'T PLAN
FOR YOU IS A
QUIET ACT OF
REVOLUTION.**

By Gabby Polesy



A LETTER FROM THE DESIGNER

A Collection examining contemporary femininity through a playful disruption of the default.

Dear Reader,

As a designer, I have always believed that fashion is an important form of storytelling. I am naturally drawn to subtle visual cues, quiet social commentaries, and beautiful textile textures and prints that turn a garment into a meaningful conversation.

Growing up surrounded by the female strength of my mother and grandmother, alongside my two sisters and my father, and surrounded by aunts, friends' mothers, and female friendships, while attending an all-girls school, I developed a passionate belief in female solidarity. My belief in women's rights is a core element of who I am, and it is a passion that only grows as I do.

The more I experience the world, the more I realize just how much of the female experience remains unseen or misunderstood, particularly by those who haven't had the perspective to live it. It is an experience that is often quietly overlooked, where softness and femininity are underestimated, even though the strongest, most resilient people I have ever known are the women I am surrounded by.



My Grandma and I.



My mum, my sisters and I.

More than a critique, this project is an homage to my muse, Iris, who represents the woman I design for, intellectually engaged, creatively open-minded, and playfully observant. In her, I see my the women I am lucky enough to be surrounded by. Iris doesn't move through the world with bitterness, she moves with affection, curiosity, and an unshakeable confidence, re-shaping her environment simply by living comfortably within it.

As I look toward the future after graduation, I hope to bring a combination of technical graphic skill, conceptual depth, and vibrant textile storytelling into the industry. I want to design to provoke thought while presenting visual beauty.

Thank you for stepping into the world of my collection. I hope it inspires you to look a little closer at the details, question the defaults, and find your own quiet acts of revolution.

from, gabby

Concept

Statement

HER OWN

SHE CARRIES

“She carries her own bag,” conveys the paradox of the female experience, existing as simultaneously hyper-visible and structurally invisible. While women’s bodies and behaviours are constantly scrutinised, the systems shaping everyday life, from, workplaces to technologies to institutional standards, remain predominantly designed for the male default. In this context, visibility does not equal recognition, it signifies critique and an expectation of constant adjustment to environments that never considered women’s existence.

Inspired by Caroline Criado-Perez’s *Invisible Women*, the collection examines how women navigate these systemic data gaps. The process of adjustment is often normalised and framed as a universal experience, thus structural inequity remains unseen.

Consequently, femininity becomes a performative surface, required to remain visually pleasing and “agreeable” despite fundamental structural exclusion. Rather than presenting visibility as empowerment, this project explores its inherent tension and fragility. The aesthetic language merges “subversive prep” and “imperfect romance” juxtaposing softness and beauty with misalignment and disruption. Through subtle interference, contrast and intentional imbalance, the garments question the normalisation of being structurally overlooked while simultaneously following the unachievable beauty standards.



The collection is embodied by Iris, a muse who is confident, introspective and playfully observant of the systems that fail her. She carries a bag not as an accessory, but as a quiet collection of preparation. Within it are clips, ties, and small objects, tools she uses to subtly alter her clothing throughout the day, physically reshaping garments to fit a world that didn’t consider her. Iris does not move with resentment, she moves with affection and curiosity, reclaiming space through the very act of adjustment.



CALCULATED CHAOS

PLAYFULLY DEFIANT



WHAT'S IN



From the historical removal of functional pockets in women's clothing to the creation of the modern purse, women have been systematically forced into a loop of inconvenience. We treat the handbag as a norm, but it evolved due to the lack of consideration for women's utility. As Saumya Kalia stated, "it was only when handbags stopped being seen as functional and became 'beautiful' that people saw them as the uncontested trope of femininity".

While often dismissed as "just an accessory", the handbag is a vital historical indication of autonomy for women. In the 17th and 18th centuries, both men and women wore utility pouches, however, men's fashion shifted to gain pockets and women were given "reticules". These reticules were considered so scandalous it was viewed the same as "publicly revealing your underwear".

As the reticule evolved into the handbag, it has been an important survival kit for women around the world. During the Civil Rights Movement, Rosa Parks used her handbag to claim a seat by "dropping" it in the white section of a bus, while other activists used bags to store essential items for sit-ins. To acting as a status symbol of a woman's financial independence during WWI to providing security for the displaced, the bag acts as a "mobile version of the home".

As a form of research, I asked women to send photos of the contents of their handbags. There is a pattern of anticipation full of tools for preparation to navigate a world that never considered our existence.



MY BAG?



HYPER-VISIBILITY, MALE DEFAULTS, AND THE QUIET RADICALISM OF FEMININE ADJUSTMENT IN STEM.

An editorial conversation with Antra Johary & Marianna Piperigou Grammatika

In *Invisible Women*, Caroline Criado-Perez exposes a world designed for the “male default,” a systemic data gap where women must constantly reshape themselves to fit environments that treat them as an afterthought. This female experience is nothing but prevelant at TU Delft where femininity exists on a hyper-visible surface. I sat down with Aerospace Engineering Master’s students Antra Johary and Mariana Piperigou Grammatika, founders of The Round Table, a grassroots student collective for socio-political discussions in Delft for women by women, addressing sexism in STEM.

Could you introduce yourselves and tell us what a typical day looks like while balancing your thesis and the collective?

Antra: I grew up between India and Spain, and came here for my Aerospace Engineering degrees. My specialization is Aerodynamics, very math-heavy and research-oriented. Because Mariana and I are both writing our thesis, we’ve built a routine together: wake up, arrive at the faculty before 9:00 AM, and work all day. I also work as a Teaching Assistant for a Sustainability course. We make a conscious effort to keep up our social lives, trying to go to a gym class in the evening before dinner.

Mariana: I’m Greek, but grew up in South Africa and Brussels. My thesis focuses on aviation emissions and sustainability. Antra and I have the exact same daily routine. We show up, work all day, and unwind at night by watching Love Island.

How did the roundtable come about? Was there a specific moment when you realized it was an absolute necessity?

Antra: It was a combination of moments at once during my first Master’s year. I was surrounded by a group of guys who were the epitome of everyday sexism in STEM. They’d say things like, “You don’t deserve that grade, he gave you a higher mark because you’re a woman.” On top of that, the global political landscape felt incredibly heavy. Therefore, I posted an Instagram story asking if girls wanted to get together and discuss sexism in STEM, fully expecting only my closest friends to show up.

We met for a casual picnic by a canal just to chat. The response was overwhelming. Which led Mariana and I to sit down and go over a list of topics, and realized there was a massive institutional necessity here. It quickly expanded past STEM into deep dives on choice feminism, online echo chambers, the manosphere, and the heavy emotional toll it takes to constantly educate your own peers.

When you first stepped onto campus, knowing how male-dominated TU Delft is, what was that initial shift like?

Mariana: Before day one, there are student group chats. What stood out immediately was the girls’ group chat for aerospace. We were only about 40 girls out of 450 incoming students. Because we were so few, there was this instant energy of solidarity. I actually followed Antra on Instagram through that chat before the semester even started and told myself, we’re going to be best friends.

Antra: But once you’re inside the classrooms, the institutional structure is clear. In the Bachelor’s, we have mandatory projects every semester. The university uses an algorithmic rule where every group must have either exactly two girls or no girls at all. You are never allowed to be a girl alone.

Mariana: But you also never have three or more girls in a group. They do it to expose as many male students as possible to working with women.

Antra: I see the logic, but the execution is deeply flawed. When your peers are 18 or 19, they don’t care about making a space inclusive, they come in with young egos wanting to prove themselves. As a woman, you enter with an immediate layer of imposter syndrome. If you present yourself as slightly social, or if you care about your appearance, you are instantly taken less seriously.

Did you find yourselves actively adjusting your behavior just to be heard?

Antra: Completely. We realized that in our early Bachelor years, Mariana and I would FaceTime each other before the first session of a new project to literally map out our personas, we have to come off a certain way.

Mariana: My advice to us was always, you have to look smart and hardworking first, and nice second. Don’t be chatty, and don’t try to make friends in the first few weeks, just work. If you are friendly or talkative at the beginning, they dismiss you. The boys come in and even though nobody actually knows what they’re talking about at the beginning of the degree, their confidence is the default. It is 10 extra steps and 10 extra layers of reflection that we had to do that the boys just don’t. If you ask for help as a girl, it’s perceived as a weakness inherent to your gender.

Antra: It only changed in our Master’s because we finally saw the ceiling of knowledge. We looked around and realized, oh, wait, we are exactly the same. We earned our confidence by knowing our data inside out, whereas the boys were allowed to explore their confidence from day one.

The Round Table Meeting



How does what you wear connect to navigating STEM?

Antra: Choosing what I wear has become my way of actively challenging the STEM stereotypes. In my mind, being put together is like this weird, personal act of activism.

Mariana: During our very first roundtable session on sexism, the conversation fell back onto this. We decided that our micro-acts of feminism are going to be dressing ourselves beautifully, wearing the makeup, wearing the heels. We have a friend who is a Teaching Assistant, and she said, “I am wearing those high heels to the lab. I want those young guys to look at me and realize that a woman in an authority position can look exactly like this.” It turns clothing from a passive decoration into an intentional choice of power.

How do these dynamics change as your confidence grows, and how do they play out when you move into internships and jobs?

Antra: I saw this clearly during my internship at a Delft start-up. Out of seven full-time employees, only one was a woman, and she was the only one in the building with a PhD. She is brilliant and runs the entire experimental side of the company. Yet, in client meetings, I watched clients direct 100% of their questions to the men. And if she presented a slide, the men on her team would subconsciously jump in to answer the follow-up questions for her. They weren’t doing it in a malicious way, they just lacked the metacognition to see they were crowding her out.

Marianna: That’s why we have to actively move the spotlight for each other. I was on a student team where a chief asked a male peer for an update on a project I had driven. My peer immediately stopped him and said, “Mariana did the work, she should take this,” and shifted the focus entirely to me. That’s how we reshape the room. Women who have built up their confidence need to uplift the girls around them. You can’t just swim by yourself and let everyone else drown.

Antra: That brings it back to the flaw of the university’s “two-girl” quota. Forcing two women to fight against eight loud male voices chips away at you. But when you get into a room that is a true 50-50 split? The vibe shifts completely. The pressure to perform a rigid persona vanishes.

What has this journey of creating The Round Table taught you about creating actual solutions? I know you even hosted a few sessions for men, what kind of positivity and growth came out of that?

Antra: When we brought the guys into the conversations, it added a whole new layer. The session we were honestly most afraid of was the feminism block, but it turned out to be the most impactful one. The discussion was less about a gender divide and more about the patriarchy and how its disadvantages hurt men too. They came in so openly and vulnerably discussed their own experiences. A couple of guys really opened up, and it created this incredible collective moment where we all realized how harmful these rigid boxes are, and how much better off we’d be if we were just kinder to each other.

Marianna: Getting different life experiences is one of the best things about The Round Table. Every new perspective, as long as it’s in a safe space, is so deeply positive.

Antra: The biggest thing this entire journey has given me, it’s a massive amount of empathy. Having empathy and being genuinely nice to the people in the room, men and women is everything. Coming in with a hard opinion right off the bat just does the conversation a disservice. The heart of the roundtable is about keeping an open mind and trying to truly understand the people around you.

Mariana: But honestly, that’s what the Roundtable is for. It gives you a space to sit with these massive topics, come back to them, and figure out exactly where you stand.

Note: This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity and length from its original spoken format.



The Round Table Meeting

Line-up of the 18 looks

A collection by Gabby Polesy



she carries her own bag

MATERIAL CARD & COLOUR CARD



phone charger white
tan leather wallet
vintage gold buckle
loose change
rose perfume bottle
nail polish pink
blush compact
red velvet pouch
leaking ink
baby blue vintage bag lining
sunglasses case navy
shell green hair brush
safety pin steel grey
bobby pin black



THE

LOOKS



Model: Aayushi Mehta



LOOK 1

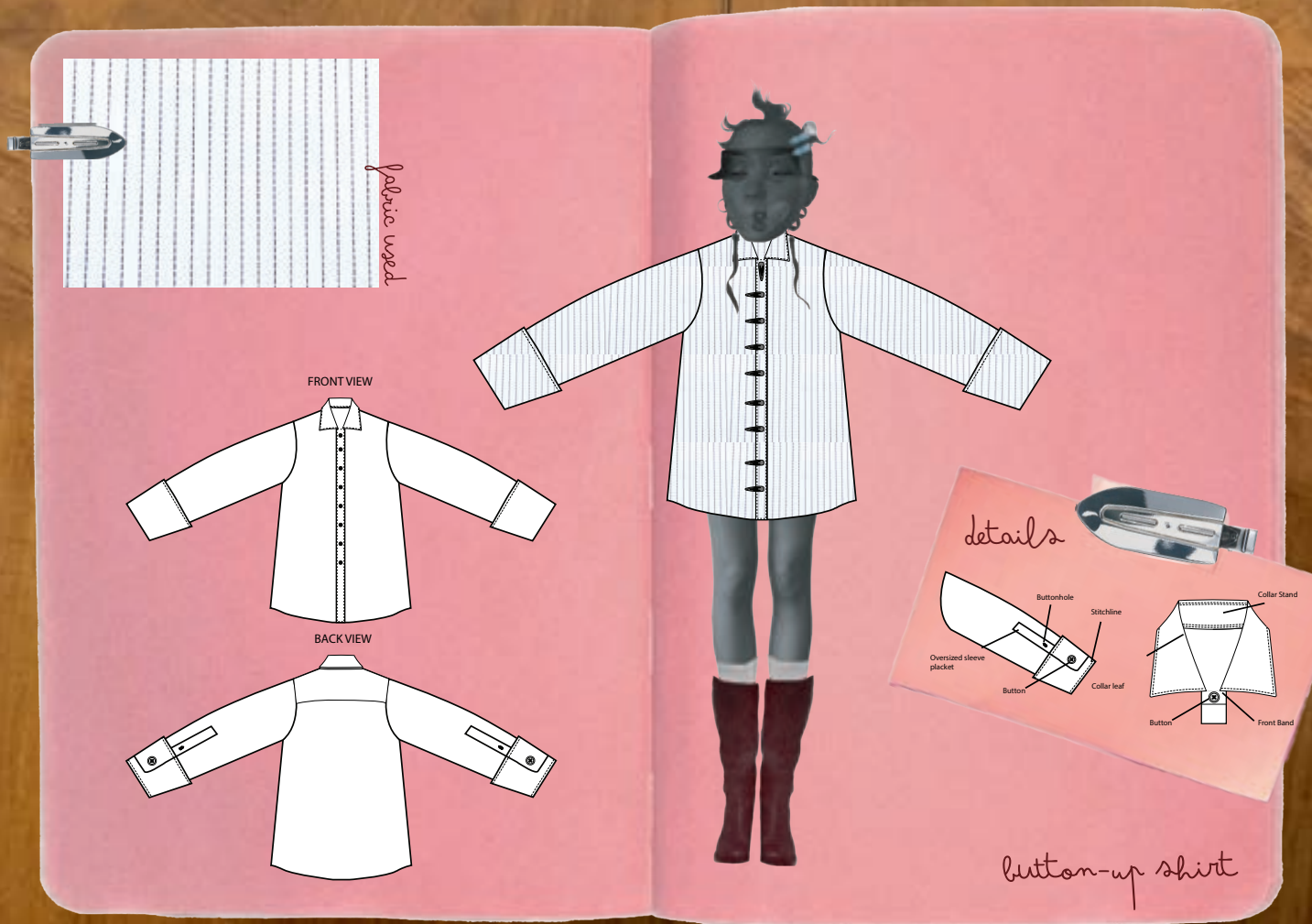


Model: Francesca Fabris

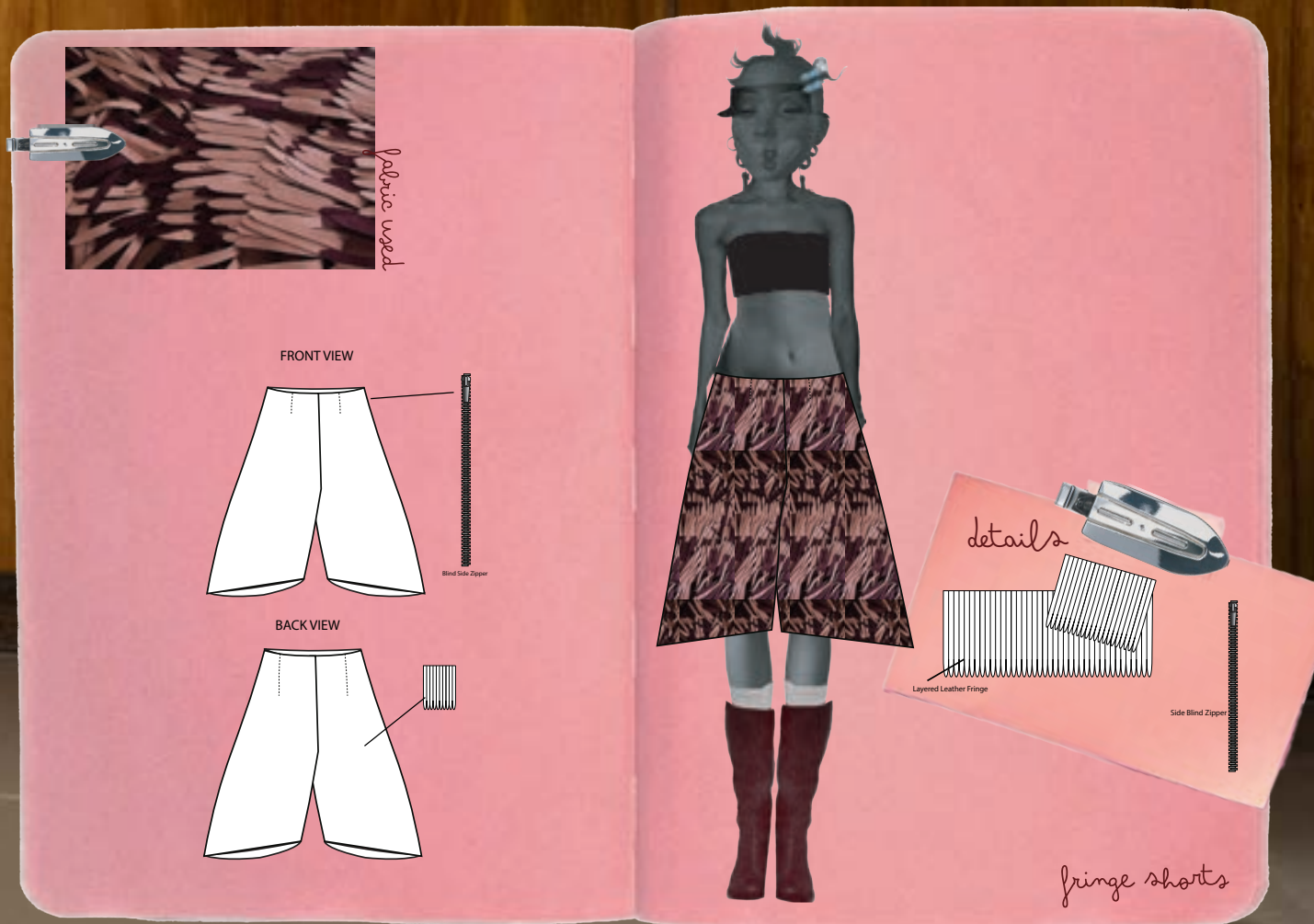


The Shirt: Oversized masculine tailoring, subverted with functional hair clips sourced directly from the muse's handbag.
The Shorts: A deliberate contrast of "calm chaos." The laser print fringed shorts feature clashing tones of soft and dark pink.
The Coat: Snake skin canvas printed material to add further contrast to the look





Technical Drawings





Photography by Julia Schäfers



Model: Natalia Nunez



LOOK 2



The Coat: A bright yellow floral jacket made from soft, sheer, romantic silk and lined with a corporate checkpoint fabric, conveying friction between expected femininity and systemic structures. The Shirt: Oversized masculine tailoring, subverted with functional hair clips sourced directly from the muse's handbag. The Skirt: A heavy woven wool crafted and weaved with bobby pins straight from the muse's handbag. The pins physically disrupt the traditional check print, creating a DIY, tactile reclamation of a corporate motif.

Model: Mina Petrova





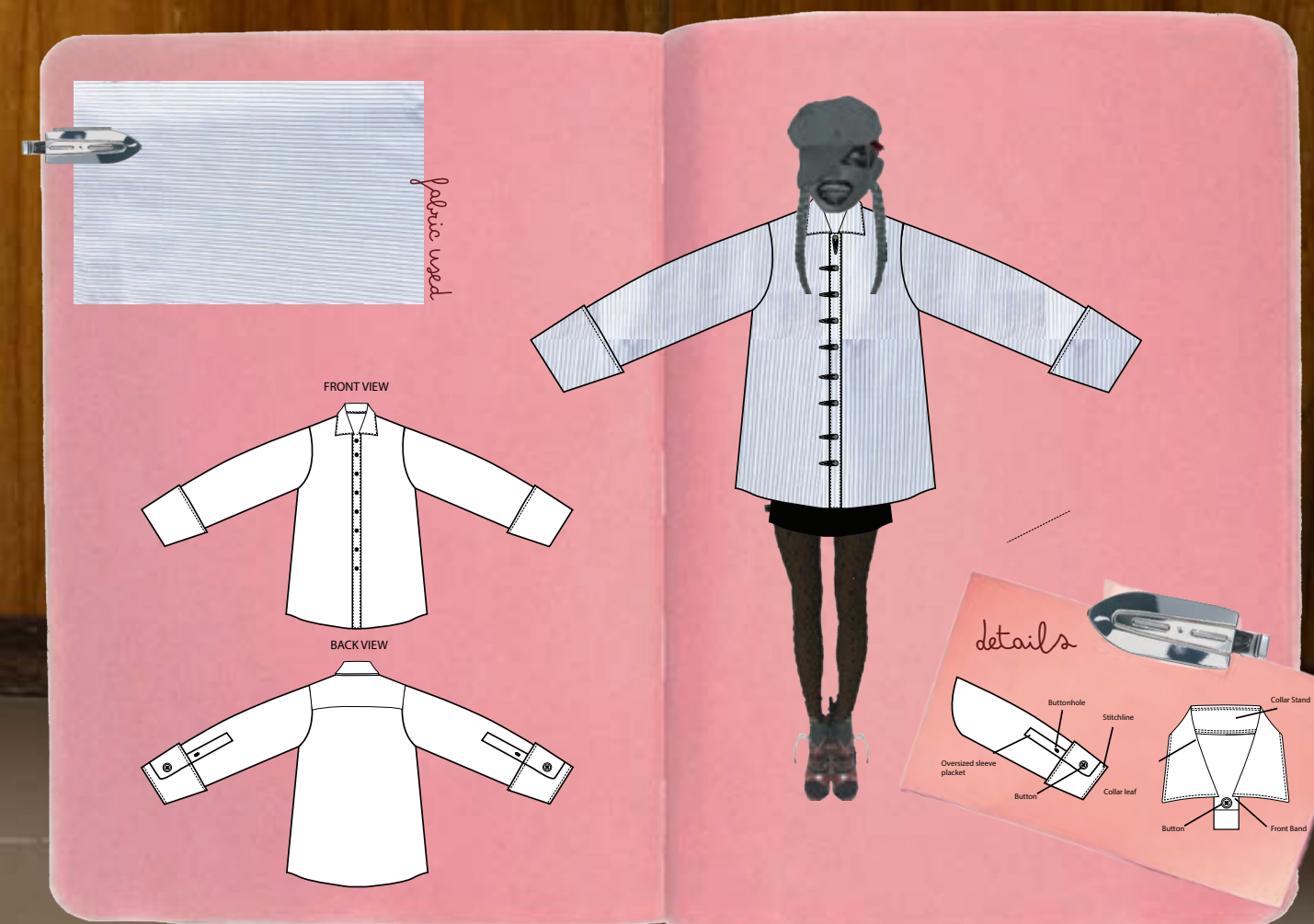
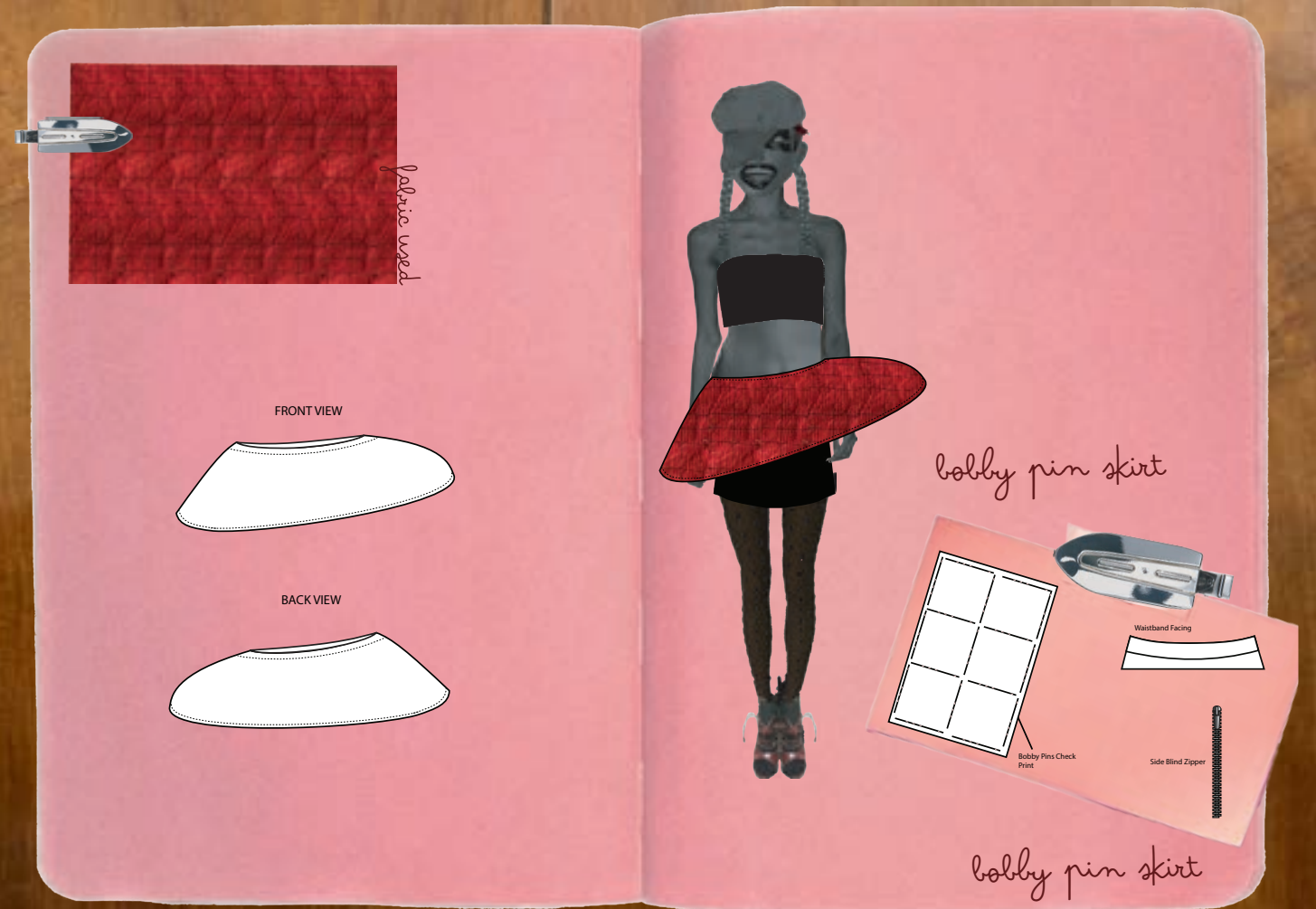
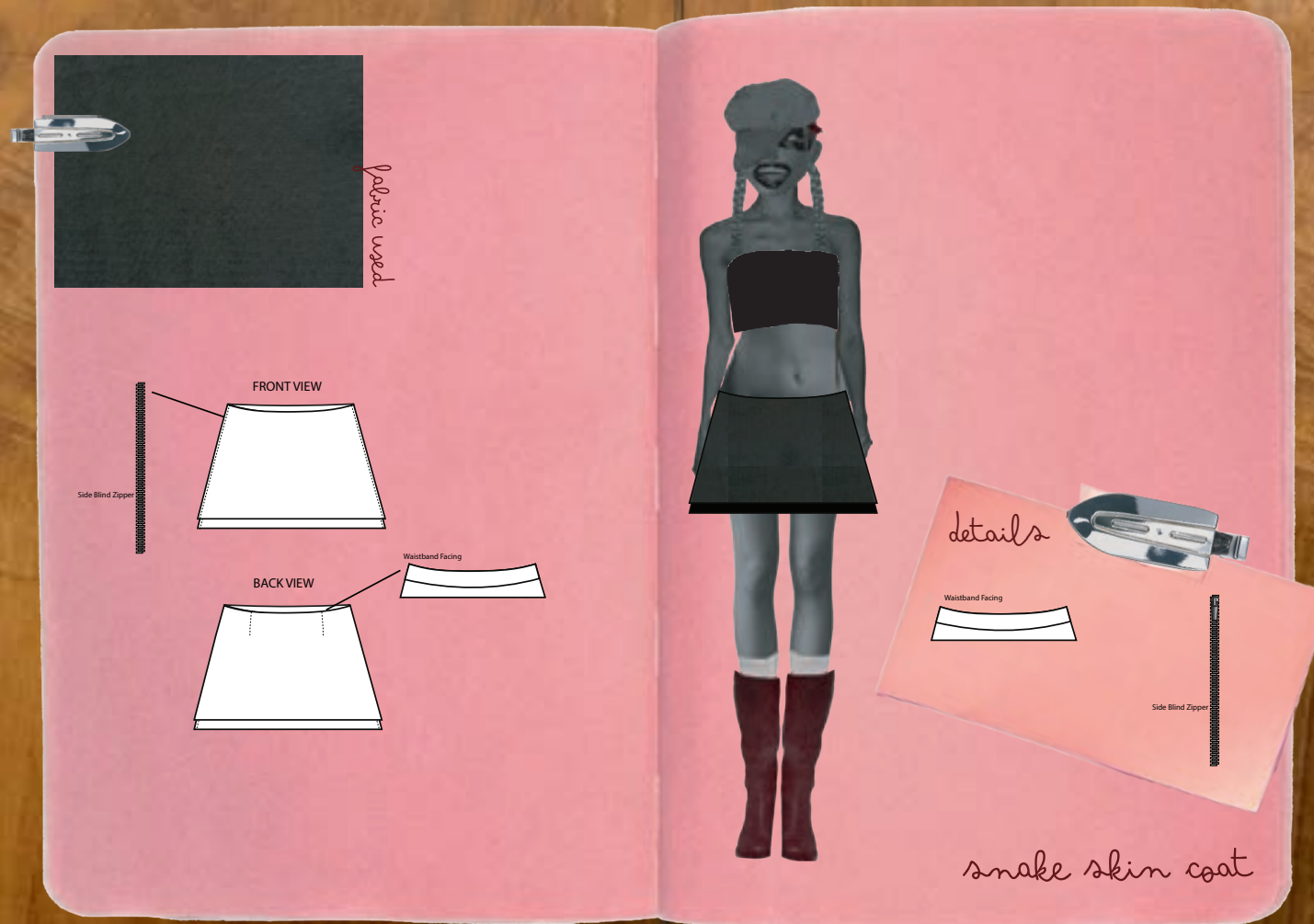
THE PROCESS



test and experiment
with the skirt,
again and again
and again









Photography by Julia Schäfers



Model: Lisandra Reguera Carrera



LOOK 3





The Shirt: Traditional corporate stripe print subverted by replacing standard buttons with utilitarian bobby pins.
The Shorts: Masculine check wool workwear shorts disrupted and reclaimed with feminine fringe and sequin detailing.
The Sweater: A feminine pink and green knit, physically altered and held together by a large hair clip from the handbag to highlight the need for women to adjustment

Model: Desiree Vos



look 3

sketch and idea generate

go to makers lab & 3d printing

cut the patterns

do 3d mock ups

let's go to the sewing shop again & again & again

let's study together & dance break with mayla and natalie

THE PROCESS

messy house always!!! sorry luc

working together

time to sew

& call home

final fitting & styling session

design as the fitting model

refit, assess, reshape....





Technical Drawings



Photography by Julia Schäfers

Model: Charley Van Eer



LOOK 4

Model: Sam Fleijman



The Coat: Oversized, authoritative check wool tailoring that falls off the shoulder, cinched with a belt to force an adjustment to the female frame.
The Shirt: A silky, feminine print t-shirt worn completely upsidedown to signify disruption and systemic misalignment.
The Skirt: A romantic floral printed skirt that brings a contrasting softness to the heavy, rigid tailoring above.







Technical Drawings





Photography by Julia Schäfers



Model: Serenella Pacifico Griffini



LOOK 5



Model: Aayushi Mehta



The Shirt: An upcycled masculine button-up shirt reinterpreted into a one shoulder top, featuring a side tie to reclaim and subvert traditional corporate authority. The Shawl: A statement fur shawl with sequins, bringing a layer of hyper-femininity and "imperfect romance" to the look. The Shorts: Silky printed shorts casually rolled up at the hem, physically adjusted to highlight the functional response to oversized garments within an environment not designed for her.



look 5

let's sketch & work on clo3d

let's drape

time to sew

print & cut

experimenting

THE PROCESS

don't forget to add to the process document

clean the mess in the house!!!

go to makers lab & 3d printing

photoshoot day 1
ayushi the model

julia the photographer

you it fit!!!

refit, resew, reshape.....

fittings
with lola as the fitting model







Technical Drawings





Photography by Julia Schäfers



Model: Iva-Matilda Ovčarić



LOOK 6



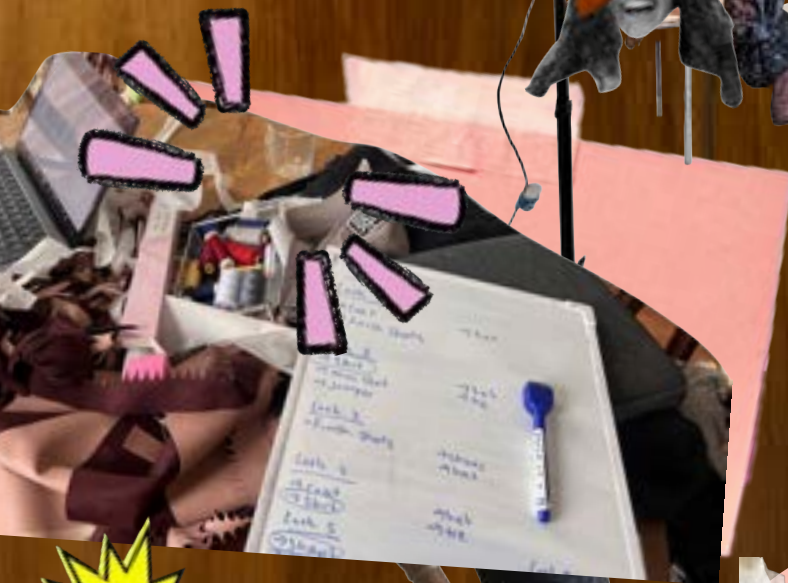
Model: Serenella Pacifico Griffini



The Shirt: A previously made by Gabby, upcycled button-up shirt reclaimed and reinterpreted into a high-neck silhouette to challenge standard tailoring.
The Skirt: A feminine check print skirt featuring a raw edge and dramatic frill detailing, juxtaposing the structured check print.
The Pants: Long, blue floral silky pants tucked into boots, showcasing a practical need to adjust and gather the fabric.



THE PROCESS







Technical Drawings



Photography by Julia Schäfers





