

# SCOPE

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Fashion Design Process

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Leica Johnson

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Figure 1. 'Repositioning.' Photographic collages and initial three-dimensional toiles repositioned in the urban environment, Burslem, Staffordshire, UK. Photograph: Leica Johnson.

## Leica Johnson

Who are the practitioners who you feel have influenced your design processes – mentors, teachers, colleagues, designers and writers?

Tony Fry is a philosopher and design theorist who writes about the relationship between design, sustainability and politics. He offers new values and approaches to design practice that in addition to caring for the environment, work to care for our society (Fry, 2004).

Professor Kate Fletcher has published over 50 scholarly publications in the field of fashion and sustainability; she highlights the need for a culture change originating from within the global mainstream fashion industry (Fletcher, 2018).



Figure 2. 'Speculation.' Photographic collage of clothing cultural histories. Photo-collage: Leica Johnson.

**What is most meaningful stage of designing for you and what happens at that moment?**

In addition to the environmental impacts of a garment, I am also interested in clothing as personal agency. The ability to present a garment as a physical manifestation of what personal agency might look and feel like is transformative.

**Do you develop a collaborative working partnership and, if so, how? What role does collaboration play in your designing? When you need to work with others, how do you go about the approach and working together?**

Designing is a process that requires reflection and consideration throughout – I am in continual conversation with my peers and mentors to support me in this process. I rely on the collaboration of technicians and specialists to advise and work alongside me when working with new materials and processes, or when attempting to develop sustainable materials and practices beyond my sphere of knowledge.

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**As tangata whenua or tangata ti tiriti, how do you practice in our Aotearoa New Zealand framework? How is this reflected in your work? If you live outside New Zealand – how do you work with the different cultures that are part of your communities?**

Tony Fry teaches us that in addition to caring for our environment, we must also work to care for our society. As tangata ti tiriti, I strive to ensure that an established ethos of care is reflected in all aspects of my work and my lived experience. My daily actions and approaches to design prioritise the planet's natural resources and the people who live in it.

**How do you describe the 'research' that you do as part of your design process?**

Philosophical enquiry, both within and beyond the sphere of design, allows me to broaden my ideas relating to the potential of clothing beyond an object. Research is an all-encompassing activity, a potential quagmire of philosophical enquiry and the cultural histories of clothing. It is from the soup of utter confusion that ideas begin to form – thoughts and ideas of what clothing can represent begin to align with my assembled visual imagery.



Figure 3. 'Overwhelm.' Multiple iterations of photographic collages, repositioning, sketches and annotations.  
Photograph: Leica Johnson.

### What 2D–3D methods or techniques do you use to explore ideas (photography, models, drawing/sketching, reading, reflection)? How do these work together?

Multiple annotations and sketches allow me to make sense of my written and visual research. Visualisation is experienced as feeling and understanding, not as an image. Photographic collage allows me to imagine how written and sketched ideas derived from research might manifest into a physical reality – I refer to this process as 'speculation.'

'Speculation' is followed by 'repositioning,' where the photo-collages and initial 3-dimensional toiles representing my ideas are inserted into urban landscapes, allowing me to imagine the garment-wearer–environment relationship.

Multiple three-dimensional prototypes support an ongoing fluid design process. Throughout, in the quiet, still moments of daily meditation, an understanding of the project arises – what I am doing and how, interjected with moments of uncertainty and overwhelm in daily life. How do you select or adapt your environment to best suit your modes of designing?

With little choice but to work from home, to avoid distraction I clean and tidy up before embarking on design and making activities.

## What is the most enjoyable part of designing for you?

The point where the garment is communicating your idea – its ultimate physical manifestation.

## What fuels your design ideas?

Discovering object- and values-focused approaches to and practices of clothing design.

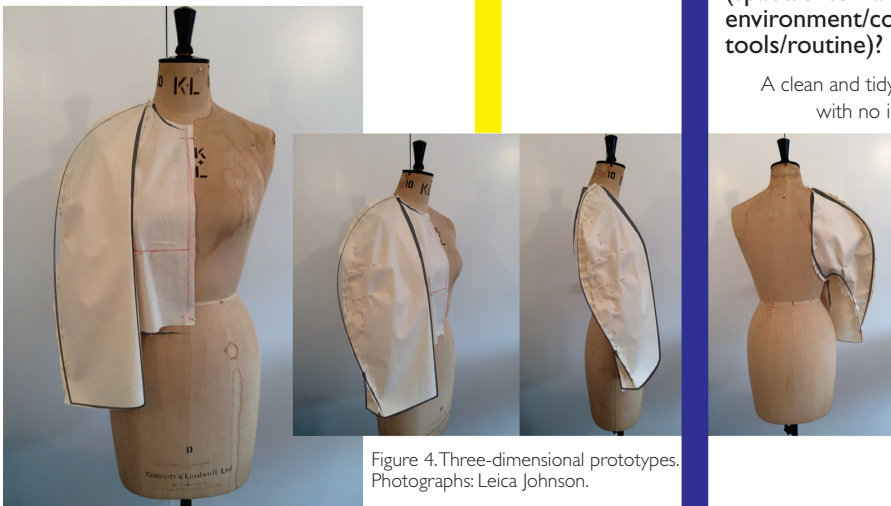


Figure 4. Three-dimensional prototypes. Photographs: Leica Johnson.

## Do you have sources of inspiration that you always revisit?

A major source is the social and cultural histories of the Second World War British Utility Scheme that prioritised our natural resources. The utility rationing methods it developed inform approaches to fabrication use and making methods today.

**Leica Johnson** is a practising designer/lecturer at the School of Art and Design, Auckland University of Technology. Returning to New Zealand in 2011, Leica resolved to find alternative approaches that move beyond mainstream fashion industry concerns of environmental impacts to practices that also work to support our society.

Fletcher, K. (2018, June 3). *Towards a future framework for fashion*. Kate Fletcher. <https://katefletcher.com/towards-a-future-framework-for-fashion/>

Fry, T. (2004). The voice of sustainment: Design ethics as futuring. *Design Philosophy Papers*, 2(2), 145–56. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.2752/144871304X13966215068038>

## What is essential (space/external environment/community/tools/routine)?

A clean and tidy quiet space with no interruptions.