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Kalina Sikorska

Glyndebourne

Oliver Messel

La Cenerentola

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Introduction

This project reimagines Oliver Messel's 1952 designs for Rossini's *La Cenerentola* at Glyndebourne Opera House, placing his world of theatre in dialogue with my own research and imagination. Rooted in academic study, my work draws on Messel's sketches, his use of monochrome contrasts, and wider histories of dress, such as the development of jodhpurs, American workwear, and post-war women's clothing. At the same time, it is haunted by the spectral presence of Francesca Woodman's black-and-white photography, and by Surrealist ideas of transformation, disappearance, and the uncanny object. These references became touchstones not just for my research, but for the poetic sensibility that shaped my response.

My interpretation unfolds through three costumes. The first presents Angelina as a maid, reworked through denim dungarees and monochrome contrasts to disrupt conventional femininity and highlight labour, function, and resilience. The second transforms her into a princess, where military tailoring, feathers, and fragments of denim combine to question romantic ideals of beauty while still acknowledging Messel's theatrical legacy. The third costume merges the two step-sisters, Clorinda and Tisbe, into a single bodied figure, their mask and divided bodice evoking cosmetic alteration, social pressure, and the grotesque echoes of earlier Cinderella tales.

The spirit of this work is also deeply shaped by Sylvia Plath and Francesca Woodman, whose art confronts the fragility of identity, the body, and the unseen forces that shape women's lives. Plath's raw, unsettling language and Woodman's haunting self-portraits both infuse this project with an energy of unease and intensity, inviting audiences to sense the instability beneath appearances. Their work lingers like an afterimage within my designs, reminding me that *La Cenerentola* is not just a romantic tale, but also a story shadowed by themes of erasure, transformation, and the violence bound up in beauty. It is this haunting energy - at once poetic and disturbing - that I sought to bring into my own reinterpretation of Rossini's opera.

Equally important to this process was my collaboration with photographer Toby Marshall. His images gave the costumes a life beyond the studio, capturing the atmosphere and surreal qualities that I wanted to convey. Through his lens, the monochrome palette, the textures of denim, and the fractured identities of the characters became more than garments - they became portals

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into a darker, dreamlike reimagining of *La Cenerentola*. These photographs invite viewers not only to see the costumes, but to feel the essence of this retelling: the tension between beauty and distortion, romance and unease, fantasy and critique.

By balancing historical references with personal reflection, and by infusing the designs with a surreal and poetic tone, this project seeks to honour Messel while also pushing *La Cenerentola* into new territory - one where costumes become haunted objects, mediating between past and present, fantasy and critique.

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Photograpgy by Toby Marshall

Rossini's
La Cenerentola
By Kalina Sikorska

Featuring...

Angelina, commonly
associatied with Cinderella

and
The Wicked Step-sisters...
Tisbe and Clorinda as
One Character

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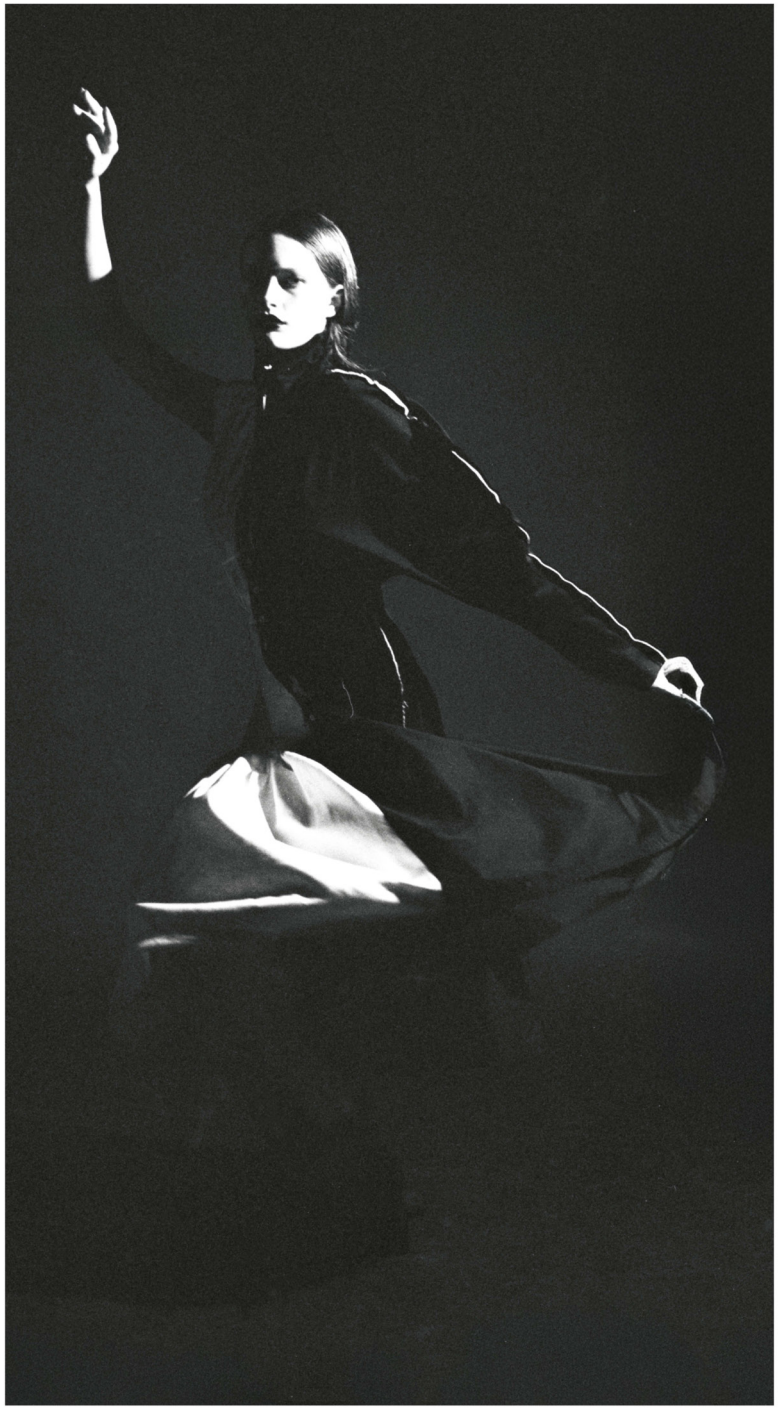

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2. La Cenrentola

Synopsis

First performed in Rome on the 25th January 1817

Glyndebourne productions of La Cenerentola:
1952: Carl Erbert (Producer), Oliver Messel (Designer)
1960: Carl Erbert, Oliver Messel
2005: Peter Hall (Producer), Moritz Junge (Costume Designer)
2010: Lynne Hockney (Director), Moritz Junge (Costume Designer)

Characters:
Angelina (Cinderella)
Don Magnifico, Angelina's Step-father
Clorinda and ***Tisbe***, Angelina's Step-sisters
The Prince Don Ramiro
Dandini, Prince Ramiro's Valet
Alidoro, The Philosopher

Text by John Cox from Glyndebourne

Act I

Scene I (Don Magnifico's Castle)

Tisbe and Clorinda, the daughters of Don Magnifico, are adorning themselves extravagantly, and indulging in ecstasies of self-admiration. Cenerentola, their stepsister, sings resignedly to herself as she does the housework. There is a knock at the door and Alidoro appears. He is in fact a philosopher and the Prince's tutor, but at the moment he is disguised as a beggar, the better to observe human behaviour and to ascertain if any young girl in the region is a suitable wife for the Prince. When he asks for charity, the sisters order him out, but Cenerentola secretly gives him coffee and bread. Then a member of the Prince's retinue announces that the Prince himself will shortly arrive and invites Don Magnifico and his daughters to a ball at which he will choose his future wife. While the stepsisters order Cenerentola to make preparations, Don Magnifico enters in a dressing gown and nightcap and relates a dream he has just had of a donkey which sprouted wings and flew up to the top of a church tower. He at once interprets it: the donkey is himself, the wings are his two daughters, the church means a marriage and the flight to the top of the tower means a rise in the social scale.

Prince Ramiro appears disguised as his own valet, Dandini. He has come on Alidoro's advice, to spy out the land. The first person he sees is Cenerentola, and their attraction to each other is instantaneous. Ramiro asks who she is, but in her agitation she can give only a confused account of herself. Cenerentola is once

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more called away by the stepsisters and the Baron reappears in gala clothes and is warned by the supposed valet of his master's approach. Dandini, dressed as the Prince, now enters with the royal suite. He is received with extreme obsequiousness by Don Magnifico and his two daughters, whom he delights by his pretended attentions. He invites them to accompany him to his coach to the ball and they are on the point of starting when Cenrentola intervenes and begs to be allowed to go too. Her stepfather brutally refuses, explaining to the supposed Prince that she is a creature of the lowest birth. Just then Alidoro reappears, no longer as a beggar and declares that, according to the parish register, the Baron has three daughters. Where, he asks, is the third one? Don Magnifico, in some embarrassment, explains that she is dead and silences Cenerentola's protests with threats. Thereupon they all go out, leaving Cenerentola by herself. But a moment later Alidoro returns and tells her that she shall go to the ball after all; he has provided a coach and the richest clothes and jewels. With the reflection that all the world's a stage, he leads her off to the coach.

Scene II (Prince Ramiro's Palace)

Ramiro and Dandini enter with the Baron and his two daughters. Dandini, still in his role of prince, appoints the Baron as Royal Butler and decorates him with the chain of office.

The Baron goes off to inspect the cellars. Ramiro instructs Dandini to test the characters of the two ladies and report to him later. Dandini, left alone with them, does his best to pay equal court to each, and then, overwhelmed by their attention, makes his escape.

Don Magnifico celebrates his appointment as Royal Butler by a ritual tasting of the Prince's wines. He dictates a proclamation to be posted all over the city, forbidding the addition of water to wine for the next 15 years, under pain of death. Overcome by the exercise of his duties, he is carried away by the attendants.

Dandini rejoins the Prince and describes the sisters' vanity and insolence. They presently return, and Dandini, explaining that he can marry only one of them, suggests that the other shall marry his valet. They both indignantly refuse to consider such a plebeian union. Alidoro now approaches and announces the arrival of an unknown and masked lady.

The stepsisters show signs of jealousy, which increases at the entrance of the newcomer. She is last persuaded to remove her mask and everyone is amazed by her beauty. The sisters are struck by her resemblance to

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Cenerentola. The whole company adjourns to supper.

Act II

Scene I (Prince Ramiro's Palace)

Ramiro suspects that Dandini has also fallen in love with the mysterious lady and conceals himself as they approach. Dandini in fact begins to make love to her, but she rejects his advances and declares that she herself is in love with someone else Ð with his valet. Ramiro discloses himself, but the lady announces that before the can be betrothed Ramiro must discover who she really is. She gives him one of a pair of bracelets, tells him that she will always wear the other so that he can recognise her by it when he finds her, and departs.
Ramiro decides to end his masquerade and resume the attributes of royalty. He decides, too, to follow the unknown lady to the ends of the earth, and goes in pursuit of her. Alidoro, who has been secretly watching events, determines to arrange that the Prince's coach shall be upset when he is in the neighbourhood of the Baron's castle.

Dandini is now joined by the Baron and, under an oath of secrecy, admits that he is not really the Prince. The Baron's indignation knows no bounds.

Scene II (Done Magnifico's Castle)

Cenerentola is once more singing to herself by the fire. Her stepsisters back from the ball, are again struck by her resemblance to the unknown lady. The Baron is raging against the valet, when Dandini rushes in, followed quickly by Ramiro, who is now revealed to everyone as the true Prince. He recognises the bracelet on Cenerentola's arm, and to the surprise and anger of the Baron and his daughters, pronounces her his chosen bride.

Scene III (The Grand Salon in Prince Ramiro's Palace)

Cenerentola, now Ramiro's bride, proclaims from the throne to the Baron and his daughters that her revenge for their cruelty is to be forgiveness.

The End.

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Fig 1. 1952, La Cenerentola. Glyndebourne. Photo: Angus McBean

Fig 2. 1952, La Cenerentola. Finale. Glyndebourne. Photo: Angus McBean

Fig 3. 2005, La Cenerentola. Glyndebourne

Fig 4. 2005, La Cenerentola. Glyndebourne

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Fig 5. Sketch of Angelina for La Cenerentola by Oliver Messel, 1952 from V&A

Fig 6. Sketch of Angelina for Cenerentola by Oliver Messel, 1952 from V&A

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Fig 7. Sketch of Tisbe for La Cenerentola by Oliver Messel, 1952 from V&A

Fig 8. Sketch of Ramiro for La Cenerentola by Oliver Messel, 1952 from V&A

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6. Piecing a World Together: La Cenerentola

By Kalina Sikorska

1. Angelina as a Maid

Angelina's costume as a maid, or as a wench, as she is often referred to, existed before I had even settled upon doing *La Cenerentola.* Not having yet stumbled upon Rossini's piece, or being familiar with the world of opera itself, my research for this project began with looking at visual references from Oliver Messel's time at Glyndebourne; perhaps there I would find my inspiration. What I did find, was at least one, frequently a lot more, maid(s) in each show, dressed in their typical black and white ensemble, with frilly lace aprons and head-bands.

Left to right: (Fig9) Der Rosenkavalier by Strauss. Glyndebourne, 1965. (Fig10) Ibid. 1959 (Fig11) The Marriage of Figaro by Mozart. Glyndebourne, 1955. (Fig12) Rodenkavalier. Glyndebourne, 1960.

Illustration by Kalina Sikorska

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MAIN CHARACTERS

CINDERELLA

WICKED STEP SISTERS

STEP-FATHER

PRINCE

ALDORO.

MAID

PRINCESS

100%. OR her princess look could be the

2x matching looks?

Open spectacles.

paper-mache

an ode to Oliver Messel.

then would make sense to have the military jacket

would have to be a men's boots.

fabrics

white denim

black jersey?

wool bias tape

tulle

satin/silk.

code to her maid outfit.

with black bias

use the same fabric

- buy pattern paper
- pattern make dungarees
- ~~pattern~~ make ja dungaree toile

at uni they/them

a more masculine cinderella.

military look!

① MAID : ② PRINCE "ish"

"AETHER"

Black/white.

all white?

small waist in ref. to om.

inspired by all of his animal jacket

gender-bending nature of opera

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Perhaps it was seeing the same character so much, or the consequent assumption that every opera must have a maid, that led me to thinking of an entirely modern interpretation of the look. I quickly sketched up what I had in mind: a black t-shirt with white dungarees.

Sketch by Kalina Sikorska

The black t-shirt acted as the traditional maid's black dress, and the white dungarees as the apron. For my colour palette I had been unsure in which direction to go until this point; initially I was taking inspiration from Messel's watercolour illustrations and pencil drawings, however, after I drew my own sketch, it was also the point I decided on a sharp, contrasting, monochrome, black and white palette. Later, having looked at Messel's other work, such as his white monochrome sets and costumes for *Helen!* (1932), as well as his black/white watercolours, including ones of Angelina for *La Cenerentola*, the references helped cement my own choice. Moreover, it ties together the over-arching inspirations of Francesca Woodman's black and white photography, which aim to haunt my costumes.

Left to right: (Fig13 All White Ensemble Designed for "Helen!" by Oliver Messel, 1932, (Fig5 Costume design by Oliver Messel for La Cenerentola, 1952

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The fabric choice was clear; it was important for the dungarees to be made from denim. This, along with the t-shirt, which later changed to a shirt, were all chosen to reference the 50s Americana workers' clothing. Transforming a female maid outfit into a more masculine workers look felt right for the modern context of my version. It decentred the traditional ultra feminine ways in which Angelina, or Cinderella, is often portrayed. Her character, in the past, has been designed to evoke the ultimate goal of female beauty, a notion that is currently radically out-dated; we live in an era that prioritises functionality and comfortability, something I wanted to convey in my own rendition of the character.

Left to right: (Fig14) La Cenerentola. Glyndebourne, 1952. (Fig3) Ibid., 2005.

The practicality of everyday women's garments only became more seriously considered during World War II to adapt to their new roles in the workforce Ð this is when trousers were more widely worn by women, as a necessity. Previous to that, trousers were only worn by women for more leisurely activities, such as horse-riding. The jodhpur trousers, for example, were originally worn by elite Indian men, designed for polo in the late 1800s in India (Jodhpur in Rajasthan), adapted from the *churidars* (Mayer, 2019), but were brought into British men's fashion during the colonial period, ironically being viewed as a quintessentially "British thing" (Mayer, 2019, p.394). Later they became modified for women in the 1920s, as women moved from side-saddle riding to riding astride. Coco Chanel is granted the most credit for popularising trousers for women, although this is a point that can be disputed, it is commonly considered that she realised the fashionable potential in jodhpur trousers, recreating a women's pair that could be worn both on and off a horse. Jodhpurs have always been considered practical garments, loose from the thigh down to the knee, where the fit around the calf becomes tight.

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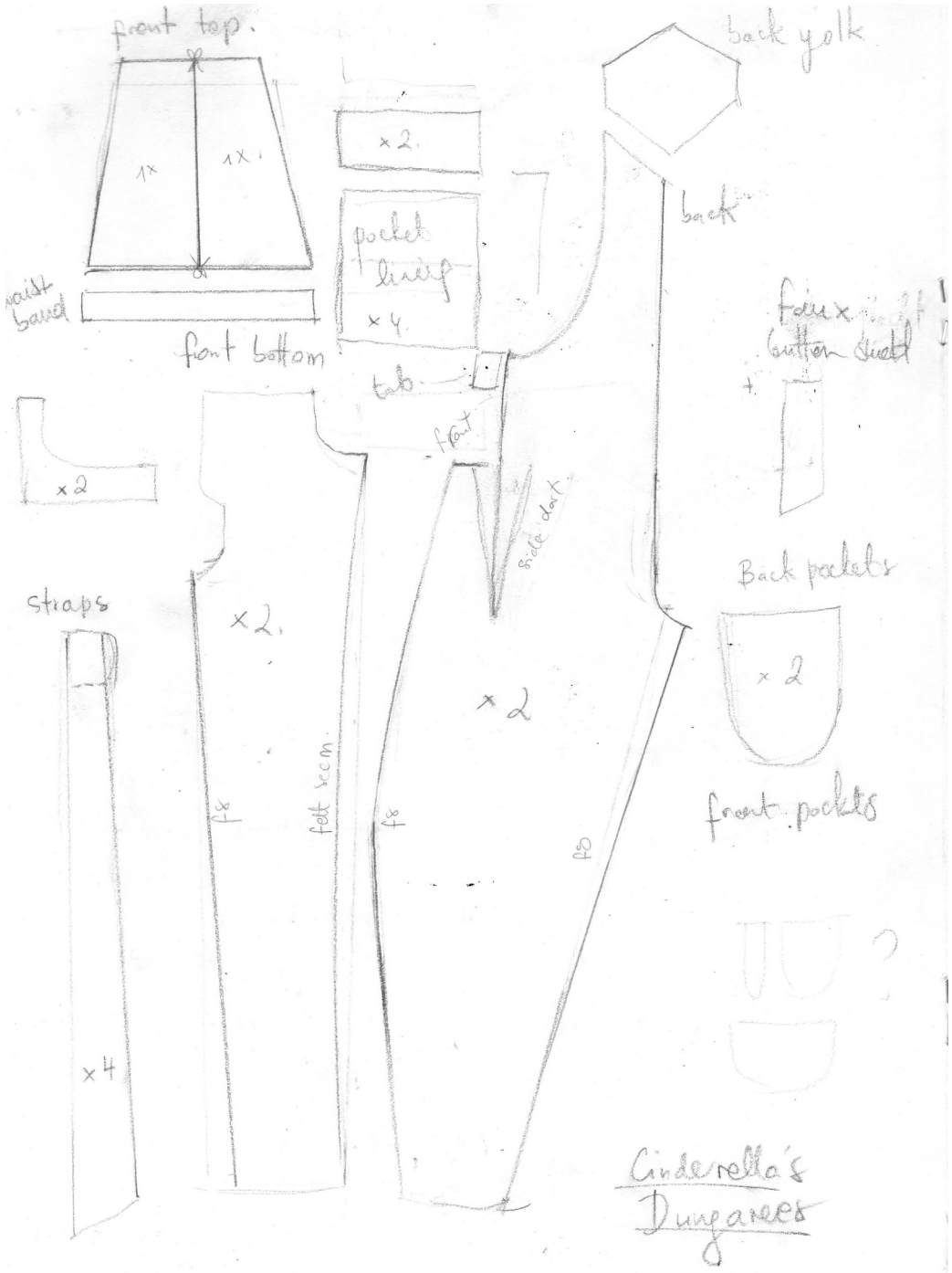
Fig15. Indian servants watching their masters play polo, 1839

Left to right: (Fig16) Aviation pioneer Elinor Smith from an Diego Air and Space Museum Archive, April 1929. (Fig17) Gabrielle Chanel at Royallieu Stables from Tatler, 1909.

The social context of the jodhpur trouser in combination with the 50s American worker's clothing, is what inspired the construction of my denim dungarees. Although not exactly shaped liked a jodhpur, the balloon shape, wide at the thigh and knee, then tapering in at the ankle references the round shape of jodhpurs, and the use of denim, and the dungaree as a garment, styled with a shirt, references the American workwear. The dungarees themselves feature button openings, as was the equestrian, and workwear custom, the seams are flat felled, for extra strength and durability, and there are numerous pockets on the top flap, and trouser legs. Originally the plan was for the garment to be white and the shirt black, however, having thought about the practicality of the outfit, to be in line with its contextual references, black would be a much more practical colour for housework that Angelina has to do. Sticking to the black/white palette, the shirt became white.



I added faux fading by painting around areas that would have been more heavily worn, while also breaking the costume down on the edges of seams, cuffs pockets, and knees - I must admit there was a limit to how much I could break my denim down, considering its heavy weight, and that its purpose is to withhold industrial working conditions. I airbrushed the knees using white paint, spraying each layer, waiting for it to dry, and spraying again, and repeated this process over 30 times until the colour became opaque. Around the edges I used screen-printing opaque paint as the ink was brighter with this technique, and I could have more control using a brush around tighter areas. I also used a spatula to spread the ink more thickly around the dungarees to imitate paint strokes, as I thought in a modern setting Angelina would not just be forced to more traditional female domestic work, such as cleaning or cooking, but also, or perhaps instead to other tasks, such as painting, fixing things, garden work, etc. These marks were also more sharply white than the airbrushing, and I thought adding more of this also would look better on stage, as it added a nice texture, and played with the monochrome black/white palette of the whole production.

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Photography by Toby Marshall

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II. Angelina as a Princess, going to the ball

For Angelina's look as a princess I wanted to retain some of the masculinity of the dungarees, yet still play with the romanticism that Cinderella is so notorious for. From my initial research into Oliver Messel, I came across two pieces that inspired this costume; one of the garments was a military jacket he designed for a Highlander in the scene 'Picadilly 1830' in C.B. Cochran's *Revue* (1930), worn by the Russian dancer Serge Lifar, (V&A, 2004) and a dress, which was a costume for an Attendant in the ballet, *Homage to the Queen* (1953), created for the coronation of Elizabeth II (V&A, 2004).

Left to right: (Fig18) Jacket designed by Oliver Messel for Cochran's 1930 Revue, V&A.
(Fig19) Dress designed by Oliver Messel for Homage to the Queen, 1953, V&A

Illustration by Kalina Sikorska

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Although these pieces were not designed for the Glyndebourne stage, both are part of Oliver Messel's design world that I wanted to pay homage to, and their historical contexts also help aid the narrative of my version of *La Cenerentola.* To begin with, what I found particularly fitting about the jacket, was that in 1931 it was adapted for Messel to wear at a party in Paris, hosted by Daisy Fellowes, the editor-in-chief of Harper's Bazaar (V&A, 2004), which at the time was at the height of its popularity, and held the prestige of Vogue in a contemporary comparison. The goal was for Messel 'to fool the guests into thinking that he was Lifar, complete with heavy stage make-up, although whether he succeeded is not recorded.' (V&A, 2004) Throughout the 19th and early 20th fancy dress costumes were a 'feature of high society life', and Messel was particularly notorious for his own parties, having established The Bright Young Things Society, which was formed of upper-class aristocrats and socialites, who threw their own parties in the 20s and 30s (Castle, 1986). I connected this idea, to the real-life concept for my own costumes. Making clothing within the bounds of university, has led me to becoming fed up of my work being shelved away, never to be seen again. This is upsetting for me when I consider the amount of effort put into the pieces, as well as the high costs of materials, and the environmental impact - in this sense, it is thinking about whether the environmental impact is worth the pieces not being used outside of the university project. Consequently, the after-life of my costumes was contemplated before their making. I wanted to create garments that I could see being worn both on and off the stage, so the context of the military jacket ties with the under-lying concept for my own work.

Aesthetically, the intense black/white contrast is something I also wanted in my own jacket. But the jacket's other features borrow elements from the rest of the Highlander look, such as the tartan pattern on the skirt, which is referenced to through my black/white checkered fabric on the bodice, or the softer ostrich feathers from the tall hat which I incorporated into my epaulettes, as well as the more rigid bird feathers from the bonnet, which I allude to in my badges. In my construction, I mimicked the round cut of the arms, as well as the mandarin collar. However, the cut is more inspired by a French military jacket, referred to as a 'kurtka' worn by the 2nd imperial army, which I chose because I still wanted to adapt the military jacket so it would sit between femininity and masculinity, and I wanted the character to have the illusion of a small waist, which Messel liked to emphasise. It is the diamond shape of the front panel that gives the impression of a smaller waist, because of the bottom that feathers into a smaller width.

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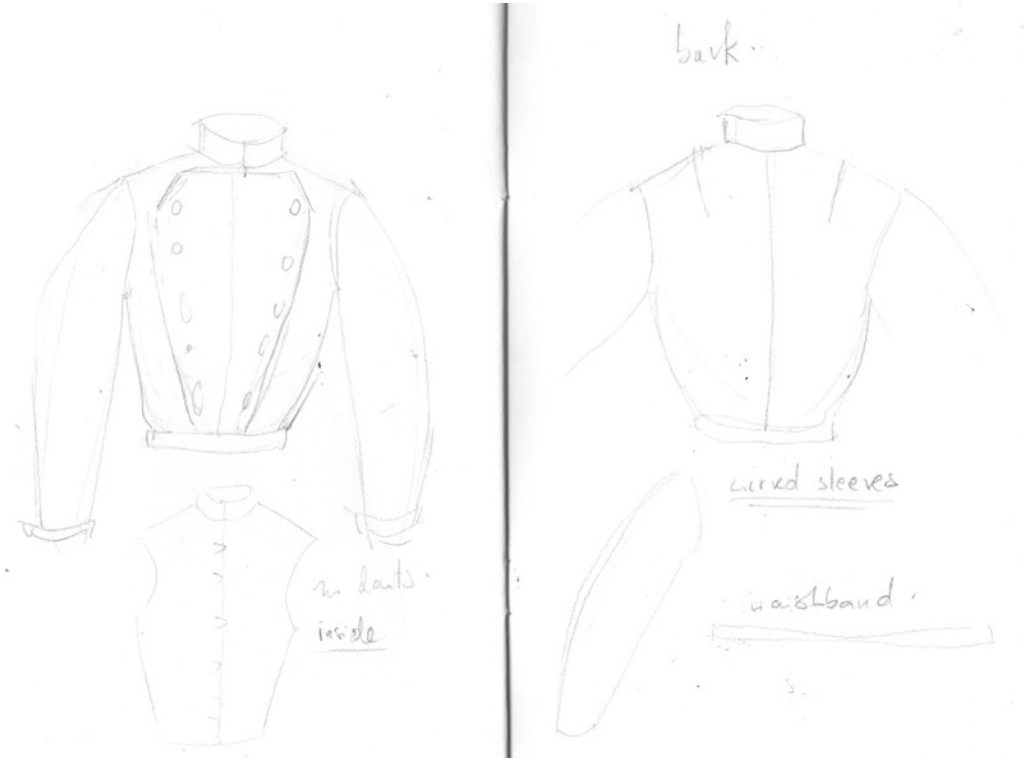
Fig 18, 20-22 Costume for Highlinder from Revue, Deigned by Oliver Messel, 1930

Fig 18

Fig 20

Fig 21

Fig 22



Study Sketch of an Imperial French 'Kurtka'

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I also continued to incorporate denim into Angelina's ball costume. The sleeves of the jacket are made from the same denim as the dungarees, along with the front panel. The skirt is made from a white denim. In the original Cinderella fairy-tale, her ball dress is made from her old rags, so I thought this was a nice touch to include. I like to think that Angelina made her own badges to wear, and so they are made to reflect this hand-made aesthetic Ð for these I also used scraps of fabric from both of her costumes, and added feathers, which suggest her pursuit for freedom.

I am only just now, as I write this, struck by how I have unconsciously presented Angelina in a colonial way; two of Angelina's individual garments, although not explicitly colonial in the way I have designed them, were inspired from colonial clothing Ð this includes the French Imperial 'kurtka' jacket, and the dungarees with the less obvious reference to the jodhpurs, which Tara Mayer rightfully highlights as a stolen fashion trend from India's elite, as well as the military badges that she makes for herself. Although I had not reflected on these choices before, it has made me think about what this means for her character. I came to the conclusion that while she is not directly a coloniser, most depictions of Cinderella represent Western ideals of beauty; the Disney cartoon of *Cinderella* (1950), she is a fair-skinned, blonde, blue-eyed, girl, which they again recreated in their 2015 real-life adaptation of the animation. Although she grew up in harsh circumstances, her attractive appearance (through a largely Western lens) has given her the power to gain wealth and prestige through her marriage. On the other hand, as I will later write about, are the sisters, who instead I have portrayed in a way that alludes to women's bodies becoming sites of colonisation, where contemporary beauty standards are so warped that we are witnessing the normalisation of violent procedures and cosmetic surgery. Consequently, presenting Angelina in clothing that has connections to colonialism, further emphasises her as the antithesis to her step-sisters, as someone who is naturally an idyll of Western culture, both in looks and spirit, and is thus rewarded because of this. This does not change the events of the story, she is still a good-natured person, her union of the prince can still be seen as romantic, however it highlights the darker themes at play in the story of *La Cenerentola.*

And of-course the last, and most important element of her costume, is the object that she gives away to Ramiro that he has to return to her in order to find her and take her away to be married-

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III. Angelina's Gloves

Photo: Toby Marshall. Gloves: Kalina Sikorska. 2025

Devoid of any magic, in Rossini's *La Cenerentola*, Angelina loses a bracelet. In the 1952 Glyndebourne programme, Desmond Shawe Taylor, describes how 'Rossini, that sensible, laughter-loving Italian, had no taste for the fantastic', despite the fact that opera was traditionally a space for the supernatural (Shawe Taylor, 1952, p.). Mythographer, Marina Warner, says, 'Early opera relied on gods, goddesses, and fairies' (Warner, 2021), and Taylor also reminds us of 'Busoni's assertion that magic was the proper domain of opera' (Shawe Taylor, 1952). This is different, of-course, to the more popular, and mystical, tale in which Cinderella loses her glass slipper. Selfishly, as a costume designer, and as a personal believer in trying to make life as magical as possible, a bracelet, sprung from a magic-less world, in comparison to an enchanting, prophetic, and almost talismanic glass slipper, does not compare. However, in my Francesca Woodman-ian dream-like reimagining of Rossini's *La Cenerentola*, I did not want to abandon, or transform his version completely by choosing and picking what I liked from his opera and then what I liked from the fairy-tale version(s). Yet it remains, I was keen to replace the silver bracelet.

Making this decision was not entirely for my own self-interest. I kept thinking that for the audience's optical perspective, a bracelet, feels too small and dainty, particularly considering the power that it holds; finding its owner determines who gets to marry the widely sought after prince. This made me think back to Oliver Messel's way of sketching; he drew his figures and stages, thinking about the view of his audience. His illustrations are meant to depict what the audience would see further back rather than up close, reaffirming my decision to replace the bracelet with something else, something bigger.

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The choice of what this object would to be was easy, as in many ways, it was already decided for me; it only took me looking back at Woodman's images to find what this was- Among many bare scenes of abandoned buildings, basements, and corners of rooms, reoccurring objects become obvious. In her images, numerous pairs of gloves continue to make appearances, both on and off, held, and hanging, still and moving.

Fig 23. Francesca Woodman. "Untitled," Providence, Rhode Island, 1975-78.

I immediately knew this object was a far better fit than the bracelet. I felt the greater agency and impression, that I was seeking for the item, that the sheer idea of gloves, in the context of a stage, had on me. In addition to this, my costuming now paid more direct reference to Woodman, and the Surrealist philosophy that I wanted lightly woven into my own version of La Cenerentola. It is important for me to say here that gloves are one of Surrealism's most notorious symbols and icons, played with by the movement's key figures, such as Méret Oppenheim, Elsa Schiaparelli, and Man Ray.

Fig24. Meret Oppenheim, "Fur Gloves with Wooden Fingers", 1936

Fig25. Schiapralli, Winter 1936-7 Collection

Fig26. Man Ray, Hands painted by Picasso, 1935

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André Brton, the founder of surrealism, first establishes this in his book, Nadja (1928), in which he describes an encounter with Lise Deharme, where he asked her to leave one of her pale-blue suede gloves with him at the "Centrale Surréaliste" after being inexplicably drawn to their enigma:

> I also remember the playful suggestion— to a woman, proposing that she give the 'Centrale surrealiste' one of the amazing sky-blye gloves she was wearing— and my panic when I saw she was about to consent, how I begged her not to do any such a thing. I don't know what could have been so terrible, marvellously decisive about the thought of that glove leaving that hand forever. Yet this did not assume its greater, its true proportions— until the moment when this woman proposed to come back and lay on the table [—] a bronze glove that she possessed and which since then I have seen at her home. (Breton, 1999)

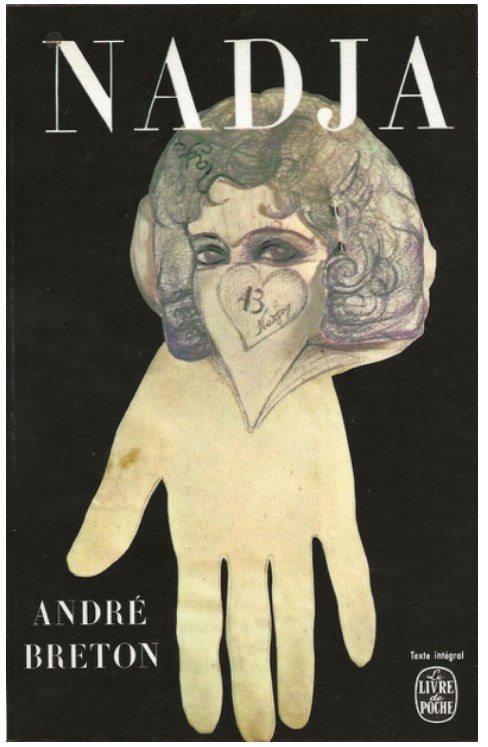

Fig 27. Cover of Nadja, 1964

Fig 28. Nadja's Bronze Glove, c.1900

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Celia Bùi Lê's essay, "The Lady of the Glove: Francesca Woodman and Surrealism", shows how Woodman was well aware of the connotations of her carefully chosen props, admiring Breton, 'I wish words had the same relationship with my images that photographs have with words in André Breton's *Nadja*. He captures all the illusions and the enigmatic details of some pretty ordinary snapshots and illustrates the stories.' (Francesca Woodman in a letter to Edith Schloss, 1980) (Bùi Lê, 2021).

Woodman and Breton speak of the mysteriously illusionary effect that things, especially those that are ordinary, can have on us, in a way that feels separate to us, and thus out of our control. Instead, the control, or the power, lies in something other; the energy that is transferred between one thing and another thing, whether that be words, a photograph, or a glove. Anne Green in her essay, "Glove Magic", explores the associations that gloves carry. To name a few; 'honour, identity, status and power', 'decadence and deceit' (Green, 2024, p.141). But she focuses on the 'overlooked' connotation; that gloves have 'been credited, from the Middle Ages to the present day, with possessing magical powers' (Green, 2024, p.141). Spanning from religious teachings, folklore, fairy-tales, superstitions, to post-war marketing, Green presents the mysterious ways in which gloves have been used as protection against magic, as well as the object carrying magic, or in some cases containing it. Superstitions include warning people 'against losing both their gloves in case they were found by a witch, who would then have them in her power' (Green, 2024, p.150), stories of murderous revenge, as in Elizabeth Bowen's short-story "Hand in Glove" (1952), Christian gravity-defying gloves, or a glove fighting for control of its owner's hand, forcing him to make a Nazi salute, as in Stanely Kubrick's Dr Strangelove (1964) (Green, 2024, pp.143-150).

However, Green's example that particularly struck a chord with me, was the Middle English romance, *Sir Degare* (Laskaya, Salisbury, 2012), in which a knight, who is born in secret to a princess who had been raped by a fairy, is given a pair of magic gloves with a letter that tells him that the only hands that will fit are those of his mother; a mother whom he has never met (Green, 2024, p.150). In his quest he becomes engaged to the king's daughter, however on the wedding night decides to present her with the gloves, which fit her perfectly. Thus, the couple realises that they are mother and son, leading to the dissolution of their incestuous union (Green, 2024, p.150). The parallels to Cinderella are glaring; Green herself highlights

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that 'like Cinderella's slipper, these magic gloves lead Degare to the only person who can wear them,' (Green, 2024, p.150). Among Green's examples, Degare and in part, Cinderella's story, highlight the crucial relationship between clothing and body, the hand and glove, which 'evokes not an impenetrable barrier but a magically porous borderline-' gloves hold a delicate balance between the normal and the paranormal. They are seen as helping to navigate between the physical world and the realm of the supernatural, between the familiar and the strange' (Green, 2024, pp.144-5).

It is not at all surprising, considering these contexts, that Breton, the founder of Surrealism, a movement built on the irrational, the unconscious, the illogical, would see that pale blue glove and be struck by its mysterious presence, and his absurd reaction to it. It is interesting to see the parallel between Breton's own real-life experience of the 'panic' he feels 'about the thought of that glove leaving that hand forever', (Breton, 1999) and some of the magical examples in which gloves are separated from their original owner, which shows the dangers this presents. As the leader of the surreal world, he inherently understands the magic that is tied to a separated glove, or a lost object. In *The Surrealist Manifesto* Breton and Goll wrote, 'Surrealism will usher you into death, which is a secret society. It will glove your hand, burying therein the profound M with which the word Memory begins.' (Breton, Goll, 1924) There is unlikely a more magical and mysterious sentence, even linguistically speaking, in a manifesto than this. Uncoincidentally the act of gloving, is the act of cloaking oneself in the powers of Surrealism, in the inexplainable.

Francesca Woodman's photo of her arms gloved in bark (1980) ushers you into its own surreal, 'secret' and mythical society. The image is widely accepted as a reference to the myth of Apollo and Daphne from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. A tale which depicts the river nymph, Daphne, pleading to her father to escape the romantic pursuits of god, Apollo:

> Help me my father, if thy flowing streams have virtue! Cover me, O mother Earth! Destroy the beauty that has injured me, or change the body that destroys my life. (Getty and Kwon, 2019)

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Left to right: Fig 29-30 Francesca Woodman, 'Untitled' 1980. (Fig 31) Woodman Self-portrait, birch sleeves, ca. 1975-1978

Her father answers her prayers by morphing her into a tree; her feet bury into the ground as roots, her arms become branches, her skin bark, and her hair turns into wispy leaves. Woodman's work notoriously invokes themes of escapement, transformation, defacement, and invisibility. Among the mystery surrounding both her life and death (Woodman died by suicide at twenty-two), there is much debate about whether her work is autobiographical in an attempt to build up her life-story. While the artist is largely not separate from their work, I would urge to also view her photographs, as a way of reading a poem; the context is relevant, but the speaker is treated and written about as another entity, rather than the author's voice. This is, however, not the debate of this essay. What is most striking is the similarity to *Sir Degare*, in that the myth of Apollo and Daphne, is another inversion of the Cinderella tale; a woman escaping a marriage rather than escaping through marriage. I find this reversal particularly relevant to how I have shaped and viewed my own *La Cenerentola*; my interpretation urges viewers to question the romanticism of the tale, and the allusion to these references, through replacing the bracelet with a glove, helps to perpetuate this inversion.

I invite the audience to consider Daphne's plea to 'Destroy the beauty that has injured me, or change the body that destroys my life', with relation to *La Cenerentola.* This statement unfortunately speaks to many women, whose bodies have and continue to be objectified, used, misused, and discarded. The statement is not just applicable to more traditional notions of beauty, but applies to both conventional and unconventional beauty. Perhaps it is more obviously relevant to the step-sisters than Cinderella, who have both arguably been damned to wickedness by their ugliness, or vice-versa, resulting in them being rejected by the Prince. In contrast traditional, romantic, versions of Cinderella, and *La Cenerentola*, convey that the protagonist's kind-spirit, and thus pure beauty, have helped her escape her unfortunate life into the bliss of married life, opposing Daphne's assertion that her own body destroyed her life. While my colonial portrayal of her character asserts that he has gained something through her new accumulation of power and wealth, through my gloved version of *La Cenerentola*,

I want to simultaneously suggest that her "fairy-tale" ending is not so simple. Simply because, (a) we do not know what happens to her after her "ending", that being marriage, (b) marriage, from the perspective of a modern audience, is more openly critiqued, especially from the female perspective, and (c) royal marriages are particularly not known for their freedoms. Although open ended, I aim to suggest that perhaps Angelina has escaped from one form of imprisonment to another. If we take Warner's observation that the opera was a place 'more of a social communication in which people could recognise their own concerns', I think a modern audience would, as I say, be naturally more inclined to question whether the ending is indeed a happy one. Wide-spread phrases often give insight into social disposition, and so the phrase 'marriage is a prison', likely reflects contemporary perceptions of marriage as confining. Historically, marriage *is* widely considered to be an inherently patriarchal institution, designed to benefit men. Jia Tolentino wrote in her essay, "I Thee Dread", 'I wonder how much harder it would be to get straight women to accept the reality of marriage if they were not first presented with the fantasy of a wedding' (Torentino, 2021).

By substituting the bracelet with gloves, I still hope that I am honouring the 'fantastic' and magic-less taste of Rossini (Shawe Taylor, 1952), however, the allusions to the mythical, help build a layer to the story, which inverts the fairy-tale romanticism that *La Cenerentola* is so notorious for. Although still dream-like, my version is not blanketed in a form of Hollywood style, "toxic positivity", but rather like the Surrealists, explores both the light and the dark of the human psyche and experience through the unconscious, particularly from the female perspective. The link to the magical is also reminiscent of the classical depictions of Cinderella that are so familiar to us all. However, if I were pitching this to Rossini, I would probably avoid any suggestion that my gloves were in any way mystical. To you I will say, yes, they are not overtly supernatural (they do not freeze, shoot fire, or murder), however, I think there is something so magical in the power that objects hold, to even be able to find all of these unconscious links and assumptions about gloves -- 'The world is full of magical things, patiently waiting for our senses to grow sharper' (Phillpotts, 1918). Or, as my friend once said to me, 'Magic is the will to believe'. Not just in this opera, but in life - you choose what to believe.

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IV. The Wicked Step-Sisters going to the ball

'Beauty will be convulsive or not be
at all' (Breton, 1928)

Combining the sisters into one look initially was a practical choice. At first, I was going to create two dresses, exactly the same, but one in a white fabric and the other in a black one to continue the black and white palette. Of course, I quickly realised the extra costs that would be required along with the amount of time it would take to completely finish two, quite complicated, dresses. So, the idea of combining the two characters to become one performer not only felt more relieving, it also felt more creative and challenging, when it came to construction, as I decided the bodices would be different to the skirt. Conceptually, it also presented a new way of reading the characters and their costume. There is a symbolism to having two opposing sides in one dress; it hints at a tension -- a good versus evil, the inner turmoil we face as humans, and the duality of nature. Introducing this idea of duality into *La Cenerentola* felt particularly relevant as the story is presented in such a romantic way that sees the world, funnily enough, through a black and white lens ignoring the spectrum that is in between. More

Illustration by Kalina Sikorska

simply, the sisters are wicked and so they must be evil, whereas Angelina is beautiful and so must be kind and pure, and as would be expected, in a romantic tale, goodness wins over evil. The story fails to acknowledge that the world is much more complicated than this, and it is particularly through the sisters that I wanted to explore the complexities and greyness that exists in the Cinderella tale.

I wanted to use the same silhouette for the skirt of the dress as I did for Angelina's ball skirt. The waistband features the same sixteen darts across the back and the front with the gathered skirt attached to the bottom, allowing the hem to fall into voluminous folds. I did have to adapt the waistband to rise up to the waist, as Angelina's skirt was sat on the hip, whereas the top of the dress would be attached at the waistline.

Choosing how to structure the bodice of the dress was the most complicated part of all of the costumes. One side was simpler Ð a kimono shaped, long-sleeved bodiceÐ whereas the other side is a pleated, sleeveless shape, designed to fall like the shoulder on the kimono side. This pleated side, and the tall standing collar were inspired by Victorian blouses. This along with the close-fitting waist panel, aim to convey a sense of restriction that is imposed by escalating contemporary beauty standards that the sisters feel or are bound to.

Preliminary Sketches for The Step-sisters

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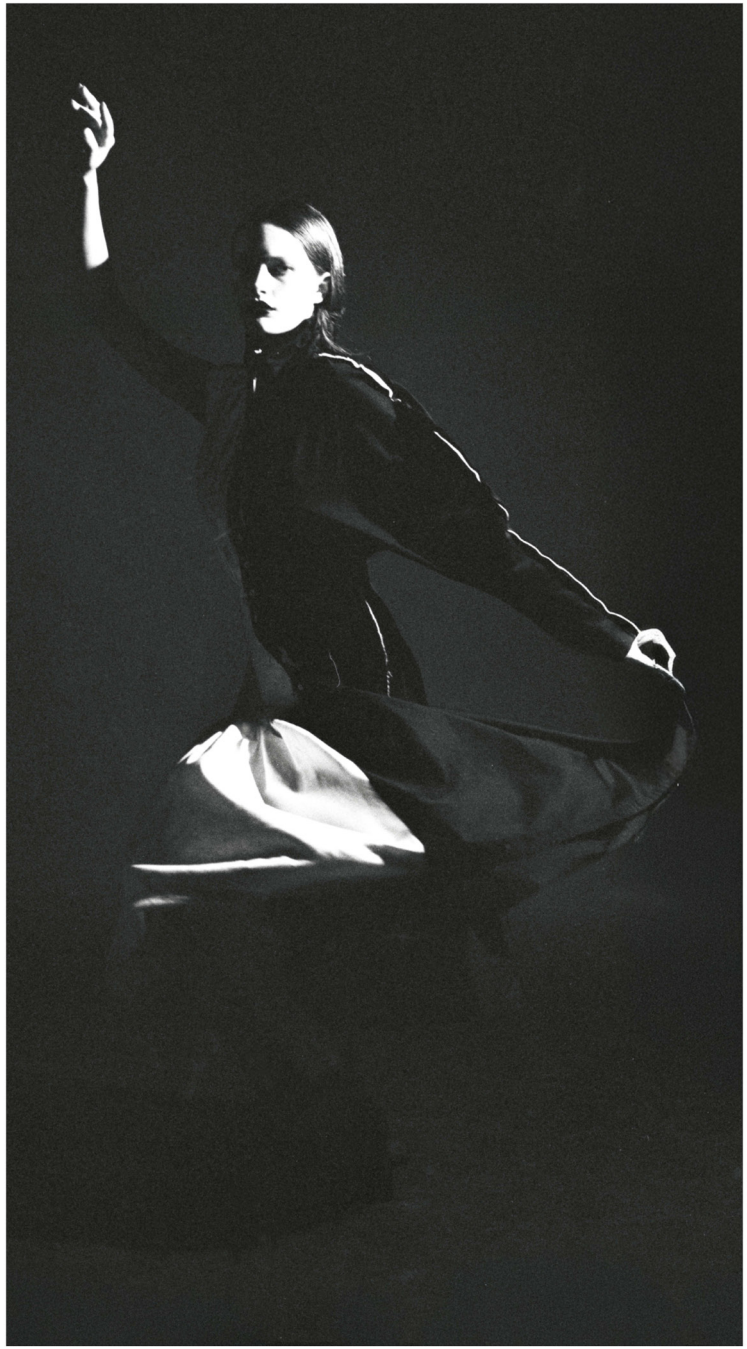

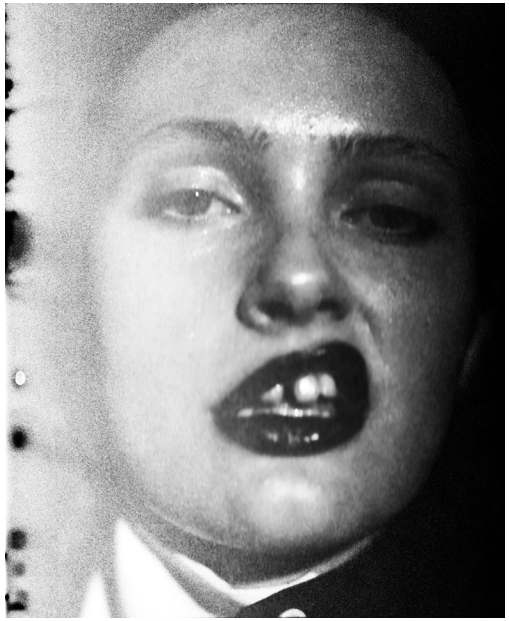

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V. The Mask

Inspired by Messel's career as a mask-maker, I created a mask for the step-sisters to more obviously comment on the intrusive processes that mostly women go through in order to maintain, or better their appearance, often with the aim of looking younger, slimmer, shapelier on the body, or more beautiful. I thought creating the mask for the sisters was more appropriate than for Angelina, as they are more active in their pursuit of Prince Ramiro, and there are also the associations to other versions of the Cinderella fairy-tale that are more violent, in which the sisters, or Cinderella perform grotesque acts. The most notorious example, in Europe, would be the Brothers Grimm version where the sisters cut their toes off in order to fit in Cinderella's glass slipper. Shaping my own version of *La Cenerentola* has been substantially influenced by this telling of Cinderella. Around the age of six or seven, my primary school took us to a pantomime showing of *Cinderella*, in which the sisters perform this act at the end, and along with their shrieking voices and crazy eyes, I remember being so terrified of the experience. I have never been naturally very expressive around groups of people, and so that memory has stayed with me, as I was uncontrollably upset and scared at watching that scene. It is, however, this unnerving feeling that I want to evoke through my costuming of the sisters, and why the mask has taken this surreal and creepy aesthetic.

I was thus drawn to Sylvia Plath's poem, "Face Lift" (1962), that I found conjured the same feeling I felt watching the sisters cut their toes off on stage. The poem explores similar themes to Francesca Woodman's work, including ideas about the self, body, beauty, preservation, and transformation. It is, as the name suggests, about the experience of undergoing cosmetic surgery:

> Now she's done for, the dewlapped lady
> I watched settle, line by line, in my mirrorÐ
> Old sock-face, sagged on a darning egg.
> They've trapped her in some laboratory jar.
> Let her die there, or wither incessantly for the next fifty years,
> Nodding and rocking and fingering her thin hair.
> Mother to myself, I wake swaddled in gauze,
> Pink and smooth as a baby. (Plath, 1962)

Plath uses language such as, 'leaking', 'draining', 'peels', 'exhibiting', 'nude', that suggests a shedding, a flowing out, an escape, that leaves the self-exposed and empty. The last line particularly emphasises this, suggesting there is a raw soreness to the speaker's new 'pink skin'. There is a separation between body and identity Ð 'skin doesn't have roots, it peels away as paper', that also leads to a split in the speaker, who has a self at the beginning of the poem, that is different to the self at the end. For me, Plath captures the 'chalk on a blackboard' (Plath, 1962) type of feeling that

arises when I think of the invasive nature of cosmetic surgery, and bodily violence.

Again, in relation to Wayner's comment that in the past opera was 'more of a social communication in which people could recognise their own concerns', in my own version, I am hinting that cosmetic surgery feels like the modern equivalent of cutting off a foot. Kathryn Pauly Morgan in her essay, "Women and the Knife: Cosmetic Surgery and the Colonization of Women's Bodies", argues that 'We are witnessing a *normalization* of elective cosmetic surgery.' (Pauly Morgan, 1991, p. 28). Juxtaposed with Angelina's idyllic, and as I have mentioned conventionally Western, beauty, the sisters do not necessarily meet the same standards, which I imply, through my mask, leads them to going under the knife, and like Plath's 'mummy' clothed speaker, their old younger and "uncorrupted" selves become masked and forgotten.

There were two masks that I used as reference. Firstly, the Iris Van Herpen "Syntopia" (2012), which I saw at the designer's exhibition in Paris at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, was a big motivator in creating a mask in my own aesthetic. The morphing juxtaposed faces look as though there is a metamorphosis underway, distorting the wearer's face, and I though creating this type of illusionary mask would fit better, particularly I thought I could achieve an effect which meant one side was one sister and as the mask moved, a new face appeared of the other, with some sort of blurring effect in the middle. This did not really fit with the cosmetic surgery concept that I later developed, and it was seeing Nasir Mazharr's white mask that prompted me to keep developing this reading of my narrative.

Fig 33. Iris van Herpen AW 2018 'Syntopia' Mask

Fig 34. Nasir Mazharr mask in Dazed and Confused 2009

To make my mask I made a mould from clay of the shape I would want for the face. I made the mouth open in an 'o' shape, to resemble the action of singing opera, and made the eyebrows high up to also give quite a stern and tightened appearance. Having made my base, I layered bandage plaster over the mould until I was happy with this too. Some of the bandage I kept exposed to not hide the 'gauze' material, to reference the 'mummy-cloths' and in Plath's poem (Plath, 1962). I also paper-mâchéd scrap, ripped up pieces of pattern paper either of my first draft of patterns that did not work out, or of the surrounding notes I make while I am constructing my garments. The scribbles, crossed out numbers, and markings particularly look haunting on a face, as if the face itself is being constructed and dissected, as in plastic surgery. For the hair I used two different materials and aesthetics on each side to set apart the characters. On one side I used a hair-like material I found on a walk in the countryside, probably sheep wool, which has a faded blonde colour, and is very matted and messy. The other side is dried up leaves I picked from my local park and painted white. Using these found materials I remembered Messel's own use of found objects.

Making the mask mould & base

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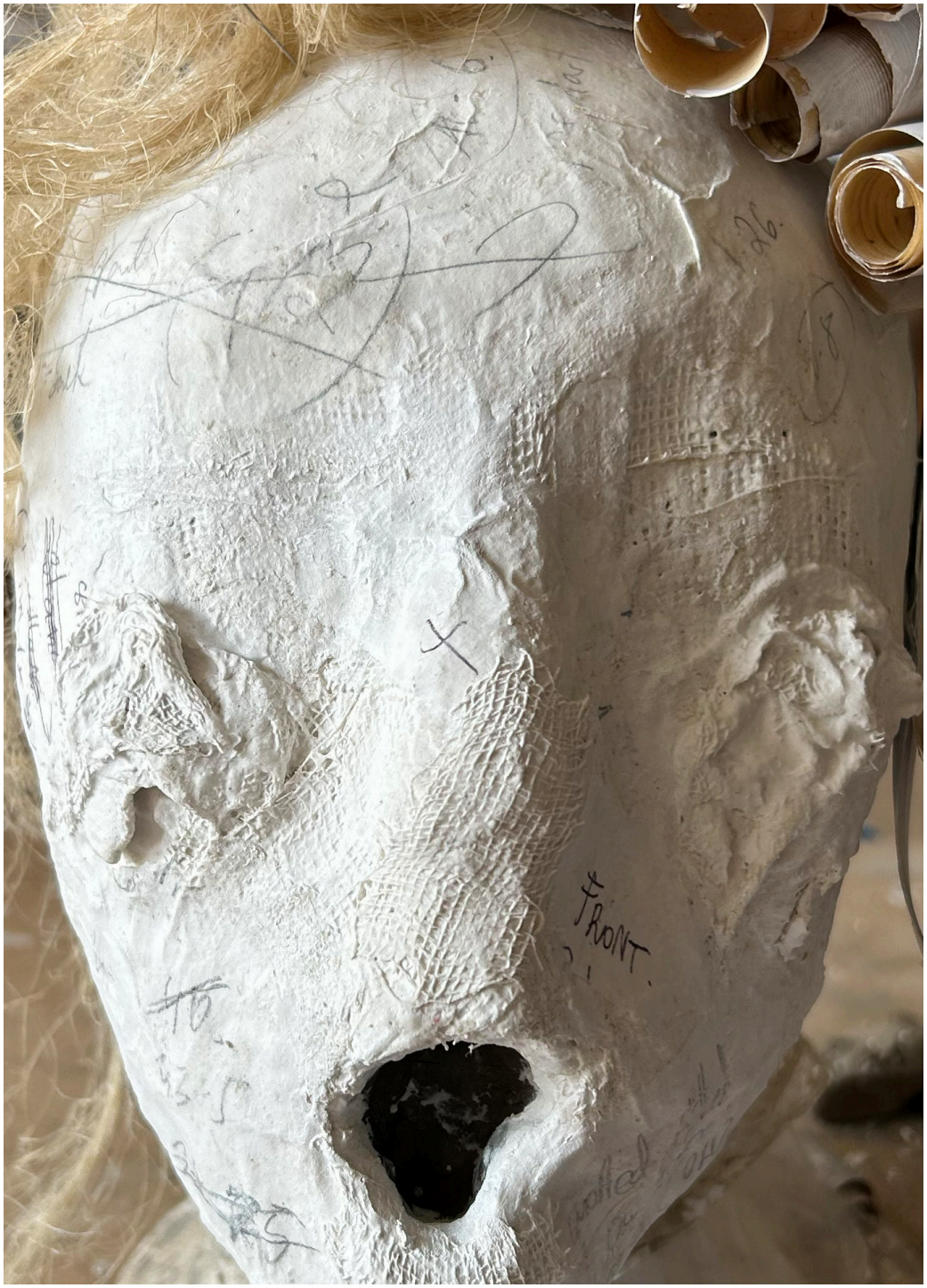

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This project has been shaped as much by spontaneity as by vision. While the core ideas were clear from the beginning, I found meaning in allowing the narrative to evolve as the work progressed. Collaborating with photographer Toby Marshall was an especially significant part of this process. Since these costumes were never intended for an actual opera stage, the photographs became the stage instead - a way of constructing the world I imagined and of amplifying the surreal, unsettling qualities at the heart of my designs. This also pushed me to think differently about costume: how fabric, texture, and silhouette would be read through the camera, and how the pieces could carry their presence more strikingly in images.

At the centre of this retelling of *La Cenerentola* was a desire to draw out the story's darker tones rather than its romantic surface. I wanted to explore the tensions within the female characters - their labour, their beauty, their grotesquerie - and to hold these opposites together in uneasy balance. The influence of Francesca Woodman was crucial. The romantically dream-like yet haunting energy her work carries, is the essence I hoped to channel in my own.

What emerges, then, is a version of *La Cenerentola* that feels both familiar and unsettled - a tale where denim and feathers carry the weight of memory, where masks reveal as much as they conceal, and where beauty is tinged with power and violence. These costumes are not simply re-imaginings of Oliver Messel's celebrated Glyndebourne designs, but haunted objects that also carry the voices of Sylvia Plath and Francesca Woodman, their spirits inscribed in fabric and form. Together, Angelina the maid, the princess, and the "wicked" step-sisters stand as fragments of a dream: one that unsettles, transforms, and invites us to see Cinderella not as a fantasy of escape, but as a mirror held up to the fragile structures of identity and desire.

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