

# INTRODUCTION

The question at the centre of this project asks how soft long hair bags can bring comfort and emotional safety through touch. Digital communication has taken over daily life and people no longer touch each other as often as before. This makes the need for real physical contact feel stronger and more urgent.

The work grows from material testing. I explored wool fibres and felt through making and handling, mainly with tufting and wet felting. While I changed thickness, surface and density, I paid attention to how these differences could be felt by the hand and the body. I kept a record of the process to see if making itself could be calming. The research method is practice based. Knowledge develops through making, then thinking about the making. The materials lead the direction of the work and shape the next step. The long threads created through tufting welcome the hand. They give the sense of being held. I treat these bags less like objects and more like touchable partners that accept uncertainty and offer safety.

The idea behind this project links to emotional design. This field considers how feelings such as comfort and empathy shape the way people respond to designed objects. In recent years many designers have made garments that care for the body and mind. Some coats are built to feel like a hug. Some smart clothes can sense mood and respond to it. At the same time craft has returned. Tufting, felting and crochet are now used to create warmth, softness and closeness. This project follows this movement and draws from childhood memories of soft toys and blankets. It mixes gentle textile surfaces with the questioning attitude seen in experimental art.

Many thinkers now describe vulnerability as a kind of strength. Brené Brown writes that vulnerability means showing up even when the result is unknown. She suggests that true connection comes only when we let ourselves be seen. Some design writers share this view. They say that opening the self during the making process is an honest act. This change in thinking suggests that design is no longer made only to look beautiful or to solve a problem. It is also made to care for human feeling.

The long hair bag is designed to soothe. It imagines a future where fashion items do not serve the eye alone. They may help people feel calmer in daily life and may become quiet companions. In this view, a bag is not only a container. It becomes something a person turns to for rest.

The making process also suggests change for production. Soft materials meet emotional need in a way that smooth or hard surfaces cannot. Designers may need to study how people react to touch and how surfaces influence mood. If designers and manufacturers understand both material behaviour and emotional need, they may produce objects that stay with people in a more meaningful way.



# CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

## 1. Historical and Social Context of Emotional Design

### 1.1 Affective Design and Vulnerability

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), Sara Ahmed explains that emotions move between people and the things they touch. She suggests that the way a material feels can carry meaning and can shape how someone reacts to it. Emotions come from culture and social experience, so they are not only personal. They guide how people relate to the world around them. More people now see vulnerability as something that shows honesty and connection. It is not only a sign of weakness.

Soft objects like bags can help someone accept their own tenderness. The warmth of the material and the feeling of touch can make the body relax. A bag sits close to the body and can hold more than items. It can also hold memories and private thoughts. When a bag feels gentle and easy to hold, it may help someone face emotions rather than hide them. This idea relates to *Daring Greatly* by Brené Brown, which argues that vulnerability is an act of courage and a way to build real trust and emotional strength (Brown 2012).

# CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

## 1. Historical and Social Context of Emotional Design

### 1.2 Challenging the Stigma of Vulnerability in Society

A large part of this review aims to question the common belief that emotional vulnerability is something to hide. Emotional design has become more important in design theory and history. Many designers now think beyond usefulness. They look at how objects feel, how they speak to the mind, and how they shape personal meaning. Don Norman writes in *\*Emotional Design\** that objects can affect both the body and the mind. Later writers built on this idea. They looked at how materials and surfaces can carry feeling and how people respond to them in daily use. This shift in thinking appears at the same time as a wider change in how people understand vulnerability. It was once seen as weakness in many cultures, yet today it is often valued as a sign of emotional strength.

Brené Brown explains that vulnerability can help form connection. When people accept that they are uncertain or fragile, they make space for trust. Her studies show that in fields such as medical education, being open about emotion helps build real relationships. Some design theorists also note that choosing to show the self during the design process can be a positive act. Popova and others describe this as “purposeful vulnerability”. They suggest that it involves taking risks, allowing exposure, and accepting less control. They see this as a key part of design that aims to understand people and feel with them.

Fashion and craft reflect these changes as well. Writers like Sara Ahmed observe that making or wearing intimate soft objects can express care and empathy. Clothing that shows the hand of the maker or highlights the body is often seen as an invitation to emotional contact. It does not try to hide imperfection. It welcomes others to come closer. Seen from a broader view of design history, these ideas show a move toward objects that hold emotion and pass it on through touch and form.

In this context, the Long Hair Bag Project supports vulnerability as something honest. Its soft texture and rounded shape use touch as language. The object does not claim perfection. It offers comfort instead. It suggests acceptance and calm through the way it feels in the hand. It asks to be held and allows the holder to feel seen.

# CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

## 2. The relationship between body, tactile and emotions

### 2.1 The emotional link between objects and body

Soft materials such as textiles and fibres meet the skin directly. They hold warmth, weight, and movement, and each of these sensations carries emotional meaning. Many body theorists argue that emotion is not only something that happens in the mind. They see it as something that grows from contact between the body and the world around it. This view shapes the core of the project. It begins with the idea that touch, material, and emotion are closely linked and cannot be separated when we think about design.

Lisa Blackman writes in *The Body* (2008) that the body feels and communicates emotion at the same time. A bag that is soft and held close to the chest or arm is more than an object for carrying things. It becomes part of the body. The closeness creates a gentle emotional presence, something like being held back. Ruggerone shows a similar idea in *The Feeling of Being Dressed* (2017). She notes that clothing and accessories shape emotional states through their physical qualities. A soft bag can give comfort through texture, and the touch may repeat the feeling of a calm, human embrace.

Writers such as Ellen Sampson explore this relationship further. In *WORN: Footwear, Attachment and Affective Experience* (2020), she studies how worn shoes record the body that used them. Sampson explains that marks, folds, and pressure points become signs of movement and memory. Old shoes with damaged edges or softened surfaces can remind the wearer of past events, effort, and loss. She describes this ageing as emotional sediment, where traces of life gather slowly on the material surface. Each scuff becomes evidence of contact, as she writes, "Every wrinkle and scuff is a marker of the body's encounter with the world" (Sampson 2020).

# CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

## 2. The relationship between body, tactile and emotions

### 2.1 The emotional link between objects and body

From the view of affect theory, the project aims to reach the body before thought takes place. Soft fibres, their weight and their movement against the skin can bring emotional change in a quiet way. A person may not think about why it happens. The feeling simply appears. Sensory ethnographer Sarah Pink writes that meaning comes from the way objects are lived with and touched in daily life. In this setting, the long hair of the tufted surface encourages the hand to explore. People tend to stroke, press or slip their fingers through the fibres. These small actions may calm the body, and a sense of safety grows even when it remains unspoken.

The design is presented as a surface for the body to meet emotion through touch. Blackman describes the body and non material states as closely linked and the project follows this thought. The fibres themselves have no voice or fixed shape, yet they still pass warmth and memory to the user. When the bag is held close or leaned against, the line between the human and the object becomes thin. The bag behaves like a quiet witness that holds the marks of feeling. It stands between the body and the mind and supports the user in a gentle way.

# CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

## 2. The relationship between body, tactile and emotions

### 2.2 Materiality and Emotional Experience

Zanon (2020) shows that materials strongly affect emotions in fashion design. Soft bags, for example, can feel cozy, cushioned, or flexible. This kind of touch can make the wearer feel safe, calm, or comfortable. These feelings connect to Pink's ideas on sensory ethnography. Pink (2009) says that senses help us understand how people react emotionally and culturally.

Pink explains that touch is more than just using your hands. It is a full-body experience connected to movement, feelings, and culture. When a person works with materials, the body becomes a way of knowing. A ceramicist, for instance, learns not only by looking but by touching the clay, using muscle memory, and repeating actions over time.

Making fashion items or handcrafted objects depends on materials that carry meaning and emotion. The roughness of clay or softness of fabric can give information about culture or feeling. Touch is practical, like holding a tool, but it can also express emotion. In religion, touching objects can show respect. In hospitals, soft surfaces help calm patients. At home, cozy bedding or steady furniture makes people feel safe physically and emotionally.

Working with touch in design means actively trying out materials and making prototypes. It is not enough to draw sketches. The maker must feel and test the material to understand how it works.

# CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

## 2. The relationship between body, tactile and emotions

### 2.3 Fashion as an Emotional Tool

In modern fashion design, more attention is given to objects that are not only useful but also supportive of emotions. Examples include weighted blankets, soft toys, and soft bags. Dunne and Raby (2013) suggest that design should think about social needs, including emotional well-being, not only looks or function. In *Speculative Everything*, they encourage designers to consider how objects can influence feelings and experiences.

Bruno points out that surfaces are the place where touch connects us to objects. He explains that surfaces hold material and haptic experiences. By touching them, people understand the object and the space around it. The surface becomes a way to share feelings with others.

For me, vulnerability in design means showing oneself and one's creation in a soft and honest way. A bag can give feelings of protection and care instead of threat. Long, hair-like fibers feel open, flexible, and inviting. Vulnerability becomes part of the design. The bag visually and physically tells the user, "I am soft and safe; you can relax." This follows Popova et al.'s idea that vulnerability can be a deliberate choice in design. Designers can make a bag look open, friendly, and empathetic. It challenges the idea that protective objects must be hard. Instead, the bag shows safety through a gentle, embracing form. It quietly communicates, "Touch here, it is safe. I respond to your feelings."

Vulnerability also shows empathy. The bag does not force the user into a fixed role. It acts like a calm companion, responding to emotions. When someone feels anxious, its softness brings comfort. When someone feels calm, it stays quietly by their side. As Brené Brown says, "Vulnerability is the courage to show up and be seen." The bag, with its soft and open texture, creates a caring presence. It encourages trust. When an object first shows softness and openness, the user becomes more willing to connect and feel at ease.

# CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

## 3. Inspiring Artworks

### 3.1 Tufting

Jessica Costa



Fig. 1 Que eles te ouçam (Jessica Costa, 2022)



Fig. 2 Sobejos VI: entre nós duas (Jessica Costa, 2024)



Fig. 3 Sobejos XIV (Jessica Costa, 2024)



Fig. 4 Sobejos III (Jessica Costa, 2023)

"I spend a lot of time painting and experimenting with colour, sometimes digitally and sometimes painting with gouache. I am inspired by observation and in-depth study of sculpture, transforming two-dimensional elements into 3D forms." Her work is often inspired by the human body, organs and nature and blends them with the surrounding architecture. She tufted her works as painting.

Julie Peter



Fig. 5&6 Glitter Bitch (Julie Peter, 2024)



Fig. 7&8 Peggy Blue / Loves You / Long Time / No See (Julie Peter, 2024)



Fig. 9 Fem Fatal (Julie Peter, 2024)

Combine tufted fabric with other materials in the form of a wrap. Tapered Ceramic grows out of the tufting like limbs and horns.



Alfhild külper



Fig. 10&11 It's All a Game (Alfhild külper, 2024)



Fig. 12&13 Forget Me Not Garden (Alfhild külper, 2024)

Combine varying lengths and thickness of tufting and loops to create a rich texture and depth.

# CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

## 3. Inspiring Artworks

### 3.2 Artworks with healing power

Enesto neto  
*Humanóides*



Fig. 14&15&16 Humanóides  
(Enesto neto, 2001)

The main material is stretchable textile, filled with foam particles, nylon. These sculptures are designed to be traversable, and interactive. Visitors can enjoy these soft sculptures and immerse themselves in the atmosphere of being surrounded by sculptures. The feeling of being in these sculptures is like the return of a child to his mother's hug, which can be healing.

Fig. 17 Tangles  
(Eva Fabregas, 2017)



Eva Fabregas

Fig. 18 Tangles  
(Eva Fabregas, 2017)

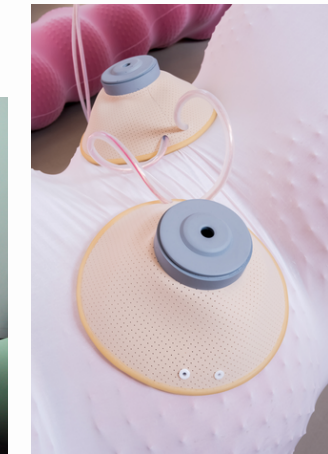


Fig. 19&20 Pumping  
(Eva Fabregas, 2019)



Eva Fàbregas makes sculptural installations that look like body organs or soft, inflated shapes. Her work invites people to touch and feel, not just look. She asks viewers to “think with their fingers,” showing that touch can help explore emotions and senses. The soft, tangled fabrics in her installations express care and desire. Softness becomes a way to communicate feelings.

This project takes inspiration from Fàbregas. It uses fluffy yarns to bring attention to the body and emotions. By touching the material, people can feel and see at the same time. This helps empathy grow through sensing and feeling. In both Fàbregas's work and this project, touch is more than a physical act. It becomes a way to connect with others and show compassion through materials.

### Artworks that bring comfort and security usually have these qualities:

- **Interactivity** - Viewers are able to participate by smelling, touching, walking in, interacting
- **Material Healing** - Use of soft, natural, gentle materials such as fibre, wool, wood, etc.
- **spatial envelopment** - Safe, embracing, meditative environment
- **Memory and Connection**- The themes of emotional release, memory, growth, trauma repair, etc.
- **Aesthetic Soothing** - Use of rhythmic patterns, light gentle colours, repetitive textures to soothe the senses

# CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

## 3. Inspiring Artworks

### 3.3 Gesture to shapes



Fig. 21 Bare Dikt  
(Mea Chan, 2023)



Fig. 22 Moonlight, Swaying Fir  
(Mea Chan, 2023)



Fig. 23 Tender Burn, 9.00 pm  
(Mea Chan, 2023)



Fig. 24 Hugging Portraits: Intimacy/ Boundary  
(Mea Chan, 2022)



Mea Chan created this series of work during the New Crown Epidemic. During that period, hugging and intimate contact became a taboo. Each piece in this series carries a unique memory of an embrace. Using materials of different textures and different hardness and softness, she poetically conveys the breath, warmth and weight she felt in that particular embrace by making gestures of intimacy like hugging and touching. These works symbolise her memories of touch. She uses 'negative space' many times in her works, where the negative space of one part fits tightly into another, to express the shape of an embrace. Mae's work focuses on materialising subtle emotions through textiles. She blends textile, sculpture, and craft in what she describes as "acts of deliberate self-repair and sincerity," whereby even the smallest emotional fluctuations are recorded and expressed through her textile pieces. She seeks to translate private feelings into tangible forms. Her work fits the project's idea by showing how ordinary objects can hold personal experiences.

# CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

This project does not focus on a fixed object. The bag acts more like a companion that can show empathy. Anthropologists have noticed that everyday objects carry both personal and cultural memories as they move through life. Appadurai (1986) calls this the “social life of things,” showing how objects gather history, meaning, and value. Daniel Miller, in *The Comfort of Things*, also explains how everyday items shape our identity and sense of security. He finds that ordinary objects can provide real comfort. They are not just distractions from relationships; often, they help form them. From this view, the long-haired bag is not a throwaway fashion item. It can hold emotional meaning.

Susan Stewart, in *On Longing*, talks about souvenirs. She says they carry desire and memory rather than being practical items. They hold longing for the past. Similarly, garments or accessories can act this way. The long-haired bag, with its soft touch, can hold feelings of calm or longing. Touching or hugging it can remind users of past comfort. Stewart notes that objects witness emotional life in private moments.

For this reason, I see the bag as an emotional container and a daily companion. It shows what Miller calls “emotional durability.” Users grow attached to everyday objects through shared experiences. Over time, the long-haired bag can carry the marks and scent of its user. It becomes a vessel for personal stories. Each touch makes it more intimate. Stewart also says objects connect the past with the present. Inspired by these ideas, this project treats design as a quiet gift full of comfort. Every soft tuft of the bag invites touch, acting like a silent friend. In this way, the long-haired bag becomes part of the user’s life. It witnesses vulnerability, holds memory, and carries emotional presence.

## 4. Design Narrative