2013

Lashes to Ashes, Exploring the Hidden Dimensions of Human Hair

Rania Chamsine
Virginia Commonwealth University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd
Part of the Art and Design Commons

© The Author

Downloaded from
https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/3144

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.
Lashes to Ashes
Exploring the Hidden Dimensions of Human Hair

Rania Chamsine

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the Master of Fine Arts in Design Studies of Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar, in partial fulfilment for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Design Studies.

Doha, Qatar
May 2013
Rania Chamsine
BFA (Fine Arts), Lebanese University, 2000
BA (Graphic Design), American University of Technology, 2003
Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar, Doha Qatar, May 2013
# Table of Content

1. Acknowledgment ................................................................. 6

2. Abstract ............................................................................. 9

3. Significance ........................................................................ 11
   A. Personal ........................................................................... 13
   B. Cultural Value ............................................................... 15
   C. Significance to the Field ................................................. 17

4. State of Design .................................................................... 19
   A. Jewellery Design ............................................................ 21
      - Victorian Jewellery ...................................................... 21
   B. Fine Arts ......................................................................... 23
      - Mona Hatoum .............................................................. 23
   C. Crafts ............................................................................. 25
      - Sonia Clark ................................................................. 25
   D. Industrial Design ............................................................. 27
      - Phil McCrory .............................................................. 27
   E. Material Design .............................................................. 29
      - Thomas Vally .............................................................. 29

5. Design Inquiry ..................................................................... 31
   A. Initial Attempts ............................................................. 32
   B. Sentimental ................................................................. 35
      - Hairring ...................................................................... 35
      - Head Hair Ring .......................................................... 39
      - Beard Ring .................................................................. 40
      - Eyebrow Ring ............................................................ 42
   C. Feminine Masculinity ..................................................... 45
      - Fortunate Misfortune ................................................... 47
      - Beard - Chest Necklace ................................................ 48
      - Crown - Beard - Chest Necklace .................................. 52
   D. Religious—Covering Using the Covered ................. 59
      - Braided Hair Scarf ...................................................... 60
      - Sensing the Scarf ......................................................... 64
   E. Simulacra ................................................................. 66
      - Printed Scarves .......................................................... 69

6. Conclusion ............................................................................ 70
   A. Findings ......................................................................... 70
   B. Future Directions .......................................................... 72

7. Credits ................................................................................. 73

8. Images ................................................................................. 74

9. Bibliography ......................................................................... 77

10. Appendix .............................................................................. 78
Acknowledgment

I would like to acknowledge the help and support I received throughout my research. Below is a list of people without whom I would not have reached this point. I thank them for their inspiration, kindness, expertise, and time.

Dr. Thomas Modeen
Alia Farid
Patty Gibbons
Law Allisbrook
Mike Wirtz
Sarah Lauke
Benjamin Jerginson
Dr. Khalid Sauood

Save the best for last:
Thank you, Chloe, for choosing me as your mom to join the world. You gave me motivation to work harder and to make you proud of your mommy.

Thank you, dear husband, for your constant support and belief in me. If it weren't for your encouragement, I would have dropped the program a long time ago.
Abstract

Hair is power, beauty and seduction: a reflection of ethnicity and religion, and even a canvas for self-expression. A key feature in defining identity and social status, it holds the essence of our individuality. However, once removed from its original and natural setting—the epidermis—hair is seen as waste, and often evokes disgust.

The objective of this thesis is to explore human hair, which particularly in the Arabic-Islamic region, carries great significance and raises many religious, cultural, and gender issues. Through design, and informed by critical design theory, I explore how this corporeal material can be reused and re-presented as a means of interrogating the references, symbolism, and connotations of hair.
Significance
“Are you a boy or a girl?”

My feminine name and my girlish swimsuit weren’t enough for the six-year-old children to identify my gender. It was my hair, and my hair alone, that determined my femininity. Why wouldn’t it? Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and Pocahontas all had beautiful, long, luscious hair. Rapunzel would never have lived happily ever after with her prince had it not been for her tresses, and once Delilah cut his hair Samson’s virility, masculinity, and bravery were lost.

My mom was among those who falsely believed that cutting my hair very short would cause it to grow in thicker. Little did she know that, twenty-seven years later, our trip to the barber would inspire my thesis topic.

When I first decided to research hair, I found it difficult to identify what motivated me to delve into this topic. However, the more I researched, the more I discovered the significance of hair in my personal narrative. The thirty-two-year-old me wanted to answer the question that my six-year-old self was too hurt to ask: What is it about hair that defines who we are? And why does this symbol of beauty, femininity, sexuality, self-expression, virility, and seduction, once removed from the body, evoke feelings of disgust and revulsion?

Personal
Throughout history, hair has been given great symbolic significance by societies, from the caveman who is portrayed dragging his woman by her hair, to magicians who use a tuft of someone’s hair to cast a spell against them.1 Hatshepsut, the Pharaoh ruler of Egypt, was always illustrated with her long, false, gold beard that, at the time, was a symbol of royalty and power.2 And since her betrothal to Albert, Queen Victoria always wore jewellery containing his hair. During the Victorian age, wearing sentimental jewellery that contained someone’s hair was extremely popular and symbolized love and respect.3 African slaves used their hair as a form of expression; cutting, shaving, wrapping or braiding it into various designs through which their cultural traditions were conveyed to the world.4

Hair became a substantial religious symbol because of the layered meanings linked to hair: from beauty, seduction and fertility, to creativity, spiritedness and grace. Accordingly, hair plays a vital role in reflecting one’s moral values. Christian and Islamic religious figures grow beards; Buddhist monks and Hajj pilgrims shave their heads; Rastafarians and Indian Sikhs do not cut their hair; and Muslim, Christian, and Jewish women cover their hair as instructed in the Quran, the Bible, and the Torah, respectively.

In the GCC in particular, hair covering is not just a religious obligation, but also a social one. Islam requires full coverage of hair; while in Qatar, for example, women are expected to wear a headscarf, or sheila, over their heads, even if they do not cover religiously. Although it is transparent and may not conceal the hair entirely, this sheila should nevertheless remain on the head at all times. The arrangement of the sheila in itself is an admired practice; women adjust their headscarves without totally removing them from their heads, so a part of the hair remains covered all the time. All this is a social obligation mostly discarded when travelling, during which the sheila is either replaced by a regular headscarf tied back, or the whole covering is dismissed entirely. Outside of Qatar, it may be socially accepted for Qatari women to go out in public without concealing their hair, but in Qatar, society and tradition play vital roles in women’s image.

Whether religious, magical or personal, hair is saturated with cultural references that lend it more importance than its corporeal material.

4 Donald Kalsched. The Inner World of Trauma: Archetypal Defenses of the Personal Spirit. London and New York, 1996.
Significance to the Field

Last spring, I was fortunate to work with Fiona Raby, one of the originators of experimental and critical design. As I studied Raby and her students’ work, I was struck by her approach that seemed to sidestep the intersection between fine art and design. According to the formalizers of critical design, Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, Critical Design uses speculative design proposals to challenge narrow assumptions and givens. It is more of an attitude than anything else, a position rather than a method.1

The term Critical Design was first used by Anthony Dunne in 1999, in his book Hertzian Tales. When asked about the definition of Critical design in an interview during “Designing Critical Design” exhibition, Anthony Dunne answered that it is a way of using design to not solve problems but to raise issues and ask questions and to challenge assumptions.2 This thesis similarly tries to challenge the importance people ascribe to human hair, by placing hair in an unconventional venue that causes viewers to ponder and question their preconceptions related to hair and its affiliated practices and rituals. 

Although Dunne named it Critical Design, critique in design existed long before that. The Italian Radical movement emerged in the sixties, and was highly critical of social values and design ideologies.3 Ettore Sottsass, founder of Memphis, one of the Avant Garde Radical groups, defined design as a way of discussing society, politics, eroticism, food and even design. The Radical movement sought out alternative lifestyles that didn’t necessarily exist long before that. The Italian Radical movement emerged in the sixties, and was highly critical of social values and design ideologies.

Critical Design uses speculative design proposals to challenge narrow assumptions and givens. It is more of an attitude than anything else, a position rather than a method.1

In short, Critical Design challenges preconceptions and tries to inspire a change in perception and thought through design. This thesis adapts Critical Design theory by reflecting on the symbolism and social and cultural values that are linked to human hair, and also by questioning the importance given to not only hair itself, but also to the location of the hair: on the body, off the body, on the head, chin, or chest. The designed objects are not necessarily commercial, or solutions to problem, but rather the intent is to inspire reflection on one’s own perception of hair, and on practices and rituals related to it, as dictated by religions and societies.

This thesis aims to conceptually explore various facets linked to this particular human-derived substance. It is an approach saturated and defined by the social norms of the culture which conceived them, and in the context of the GCC region, this approach is especially rich and multi-dimensional.

Covering hair is so important in this region that in Kuwait, for example, when four women finally made it into Parliament, all problems in the country and the region were put aside in favour of discussing a law for decent attire.4

Covering hair is so important in this region that in Kuwait, for example, when four women finally made it into Parliament, all problems in the country and the region were put aside in favour of discussing a law for decent attire as a reaction against the two uncovered female Parliament members.5

Although this topic has been addressed before by fine artists in this region, such as Mona Hatoum and Hayv Kahramian, who both worked with hair as a medium, it would be of value to introduce these provocative topics into a local context, through design. By bringing hair again to the body, wrapped on the head or covering the face, this thesis attempts to open up discussion: to see how people with various social restrictions would react, and with how much open mindedness, to using a corporeal material of great religious and cultural significance in a new avenue.

In short, Critical Design challenges preconceptions and tries to inspire a change in perception and thought through design. This thesis adapts Critical Design theory by reflecting on the symbolism and social and cultural values that are linked to human hair, and also by questioning the importance given to not only hair itself, but also to the location of the hair: on the body, off the body, on the head, chin, or chest. The designed objects are not necessarily commercial, or solutions to problem, but rather the intent is to inspire reflection on one’s own perception of hair, and on practices and rituals related to it, as dictated by religions and societies.

State of the Design

Hair has always been acknowledged as a fundamental element in art and design.
In the late 18th century and throughout the nineteenth century, women in mourning expressed their grief and respect to their deceased's loved ones through a set of rituals such as wearing black, covering their faces with black crepe veils, and wearing jewellery made of the deceased's hair.¹

However, this jewellery started to gain popularity even before this time, beginning in the 17th century when mourning rings, which included hair from the deceased, were worn. Throughout the 18th century, the mourning jewellery took different forms, such as brooches and rings that had hair designs embedded under glass. In the 19th century, hair jewellery reached the peak of its popularity. No longer mourning jewellery, it evolved into sentimental jewellery used to commemorate mourning, as well as engagements and weddings. From the mid-19th century forward, instead of being part of the jewellery, hair became the jewellery piece itself; it was boiled, weighted, glued, and strengthened with horse hair; it was braided, spun, woven, plaited, knitted, and crocheted; it was tipped, dotted, tasselled, caged, and secured with gold findings.² It was then formed into various shapes and types, such as bracelets, watch chains, and hair ornaments.³

Looking at Victorian hair jewellery, one sees beyond the ring, brooch, or bracelet. Stories and memories associated with the loved one are encrypted in the form of hair embedded in the piece.

³ Ibid.
Mona Hatoum / 2006

*Keffieh*

This piece is important to this research because Hatoum also interrogates feminism and culture in relation to hair.

In her art piece, Palestinian-British artist Mona Hatoum weaves long female human hair into the traditional Arab headscarf *keffieh*. Several layers of meanings and implications are embedded in the art piece: the political statement indicated by the use of the Arabic symbol of the Palestinian struggle for freedom, the *keffieh*, and the female hair as a translation of Palestinian anger. According to the artist, she pictured women tearing their hair out from sheer rage.¹

Another layer is that of feminism. Not only is the *keffieh* a symbol for struggle, it also symbolizes Arabic machismo, and she embroidered it with female hair to give Arab women a voice and presence.

Chair of the Department of Craft/Material Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia, artist Sonia Clark uses hair as a medium in her projects. According to the artist, hair is the first fiber art form. In her Hair collection, hair is formed into markers of chronology, wisdom and adornment.¹

Clark's crafts are a strong statement of cultural identity—a theme reflected in this thesis as well, where the Arab Islamic culture remains the center point of the designs.

Hair Mat

 Watching the Exxon Valdez oil spill clean up, Phil McCrory, a hairdresser from Alabama, noticed how animals suffered most from the spill due to their fur’s absorption of it. He realized that human hair has the same oil-absorbing quality, and subsequently, he experimented on using it as a solution for clearing water from oil spills, with positive results. NASA tested McCrory’s theory and confirmed its validity. The Hair Mat, helped contain an oil spill off the coast of San Francisco in 2007, and was used in the Gulf of Mexico clean-up.1

The Hair Mat is a very practical, eco-beneficial solution to the problem of oil spills. This thesis similarly utilized the physical properties of hair as catalysts for the designs. The thread-like natural material was felted and braided because the material qualities called for such techniques. However, unlike the Hair Mat, the designed objects in this thesis have less pragmatic use and are more of a conceptual statement that what hair represents, and not the material itself, is what gives it great importance when on the body. Similarly, when off the body, what it represents, beyond its material, is what confers its worth, which is at times even more significant than when it is attached to its original setting.

Masters student at Design Academy of Eindhoven, Thomas Vailly, created a bio plastic using human hair mixed with glycerine and sodium sulphite.¹

What's interesting about Contemporary Vanitas is that the designer created a material that could be formed into endless designs, instead of designing one outcome.

When I first began my project, I wanted to create a material out of hair that then could be used in various designs. Several materials and mediums were mixed with hair, such as plaster, glue and paper; however, the result did not serve my vision. On the contrary, it reflected exactly what I was trying to contradict. The result enhanced the feelings of revulsion by viewers, so the idea was dismissed and my project took a different direction.

One of the main objectives of this thesis was to give discarded hair a new, more appreciated life, and this is what Vailly did in Contemporary Vanitas. His project inspired the use of hair in a way similar to another pre-existing material; in Vailly’s case, it is leather that was formed into objects. In this thesis, hair was treated in the same manner as wool, and designed into jewellery pieces and accessories. Another interesting aspect of Contemporary Vanitas is the ability of hair to be transformed into objects that could be mass-produced, such as the cups in the photo. Likewise, in this thesis, headscarves with prints of hair, photos, and microscopic hair images were created. These Printed Head Scarves could be mass-produced as well.

Thomas Vailly gave discarded hair aesthetic and commercial value—one of the main objectives of this thesis.

Initial Attempts

From left to right:
1- Hair mixed with gold nanoparticles.
2- Hair mixed with paper maché.
3- Hair glued on metal.
4- Bracelet made of laser-cut acrylic, brass wires and hair.
5- Hair dipped in plaster.
6- Hair mixed with glue.
7- Copper etched by a single hair.
8- Felted hair.

When I first started my project, and inspired by Thomas Vailly, I wanted to create a material out of hair that could then be used in various designs. Hair was mixed with different mediums such as glue, paper mache, and plaster, and even felted. However, viewers reacted more strongly to untreated hair, which led to the thesis taking a different direction and to the usage of hair as-is.

Before taking this decision, I tried etching copper using a single hair; I also glued hair to ready-designed jewellery pieces, and laser cut acrylic in attempts to design my version of sentimental jewellery. I also mixed hair with gold nanoparticles. This experiment was conducted with no expectations, and was driven out of curiosity to what might result from mixing the scientific field with the design field. Unfortunately, such an attempt required more time and resources than were available. Hopefully, in the future, I might have a second take on the matter.
The 3D printed ring collection Hairring is a contemporary take on the Victorian Sentimental jewelry. Personal, present stories lived and experienced with loved ones, were celebrated in rings used to both collect and display a beloved one’s hair.

This collection contains three types of rings, each of a different size and function: The Head Hair Ring, the Eyebrow Ring, and the Beard Ring.
Hair is at once the most delicate and lasting of our materials and survives us, like love. It is so light, so gentle, so escaping from the idea of death, that, with a lock of hair belonging to a child or friend, we may almost look up to heaven... and say: ‘I have a piece of thee here, not unworthy of thy being now.’

Hair located on the head is given the most importance, and the act of brushing hair itself symbolizes the beautifying of oneself, the maternal love of a mom brushing her daughter’s hair, or love expressed by stroking a lover’s hair. These meanings led to the creation of the Head Hair ring, the biggest in the collection, which is used to comb one’s hair in an attempt to both caress and collect it. Formed by three rings joined together by a hairbrush top, this ring is worn on the three middle fingers of the hand.
The Eyebrow Ring was designed because of the importance of eyebrows in self expression, especially in this area—the Gulf. In a culture where the main focus is the eyes due to the history of wearing a Borgo and Hijab, too much attention is paid to eyebrows. Religious women keep their eyebrows in their natural form, whereas more open women form their eyebrows into various shapes sometimes natural looking, other times anything but natural in very sharp in-your-face designs in an attempt to make a statement, and to bring more attention to the eyes.

Beard Ring

The Beard Ring could be worn on one finger to brush the beard and collect the fallen hairs. As previously mentioned, beards signify wisdom, masculinity, and religiosity. Jewish, Christian, and Islamic religious figures grow their beards. The Prophet Mohammad (S.A.W) said: I have no connection with one who shaves, shouts and tears his clothing e.g. in grief or affliction.¹ Beards are “sociological signifiers;” in the BBC article Decoding Facial Hair in the Arab World, journalist Ashraf Khalil describes how different Islamic parties groom their beards in distinct ways: the Brotherhood members keep a full and well groomed beard, whereas the Salafists grow their beards long and ungroomed.² By studying his beard, an idea of a person’s background can be painted.

---

¹ Reported by Abu Darda (R.A) in Muslim, Hadith no. 561.
Eyebrow Ring

The Eyebrow Ring was designed because of the importance of eyebrows in self-expression, especially in the Gulf. In a culture where, due to the history of wearing a bongo and hijab, the main focus is the eyes, much attention is paid to eyebrows. Religious women keep their eyebrows in their natural form, whereas more open women form their eyebrows into various shapes, sometimes natural looking, at other times in very sharp designs which attempt to make a statement and to draw more attention to the eyes.
Feminine Masculinity

Beards have always been reflective of wisdom, religion, and power. During ancient Egyptian times, both men and women wore false beards as a sign of high rank. Royalty’s false beards were made of either bronze or gold; Hatshepsut, the Pharaoh ruler of Egypt, was always illustrated with her long, false, gold beard. Consequently, even the most powerful female rulers of old times had to resemble men in some way, in order to prove their authority.

The Beard-Chest Necklace questions the established gender roles and blurs the customary divisions separating masculinity and femininity.

Fortunate Misfortune

A failed attempt to felt human hair resulted in the creation of hairballs. This second form of life the hair took was even more interesting and engaging than the first. Viewers who saw the hairballs were interested in their almost perfect spherical shape, and wanted to carefully hold and feel them. At that point, creating something out of these hairballs became my new mission.
Beard-Chest Necklace
Worn as a beard
Beard-Chest Necklace
Worn on chest
Crown-Beard-Chest Necklace

Worn as a crown

As much as I love my very rough, raw, coarse hair blobs in Chest Beard Necklace, I wanted to create another version of it, only more refined, polished, and prettified. The result was a rope-braided necklace.

There’s an Arabic saying:

شعرها تاج امرأة

A woman’s hair is her crown. This design reflects the idea of associating hair with women’s beauty in addition to questioning its gender related values. This necklace can be worn on the face as a beard, on the chest, and as a crown on the head.

Three rope braids of different sizes were stitched together by hair, and the ends were joined together by very small braids that gave the design a more refined look.
Crown-Beard-Chest Necklace

Worn as a beard
Crown-Beard-Chest Necklace

Worn on Chest
Covering Using the Covered

But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoreth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered (Corinthians 11:5-6).

The Cohen shall uncover the woman’s hair (Bamidbar 5: 18).

O Prophet! Say to your wives and your daughters and the women of the faithful to draw their outergarments (jilbabs) close around themselves; that is better that they will be recognized and not annoyed. And God is ever Forgiving, Gentle (Quran, Alahzab 59).

Hair has an inherent link to cultural symbolism. A woman’s hair signifies beauty, fertility, seduction, creativity, spiritedness, and grace; this is why in many religions women are supposed to cover their hair as a sign of modesty. But if the hair is covered with hair, is it still considered covering? And does it still comply with the religious and social norms imposed on women?

1 Donald Kalsched. The Inner World of Trauma: Archetypal Defenses of the Personal Spirit. London and NY, 1996.
Pretty lady don’t forget to hide your hair, for I’m jealous of the breeze that goes through its strands — Arabi Song

Braided Hair Scarf
During my experimentation with hair I came across two very creative African hairdressers who work in an African hair salon in Qatar. After having a look at my braided hair extensions, Aileen and Lina suggested the use of African-textured hair extensions, which holds more firmly when braided. Since they are the experts at the field, I handed them my sketch, chose the colours, asked for the basic braid as the one I was using, and the ladies took it from there. The extensions were braided and then the braids stitched together by hair. I was so happy with the result that I gave them another design to execute, the Beard-Hair-Crown necklace.
Sensing the Scarf

The Hair Scarf could be the Khaliji-female version of the Palestinian keffieh created by artist Mona Hatoum. Inspired by the sheila worn by women in the Gulf to cover their hair, the “Hair Scarf” was designed using braided hair extensions. Measuring 200cm*30cm and weighing a little over 2kg, this scarf is the main design of the thesis. It questions the custom of covering hair by flirting with the idea of revealing and hiding, covering with the covered.

There’s an affiliation between hair and the senses. Hair is linked to the sense of touch; hair can sense movements of air as well as touch by physical objects. While mapping all links of hair to the five senses of the human body—sight, touch, hearing, smell, and taste—I noticed that hair is deeply saturated with references, symbols, and links that contain embedded cultural and material indications. I therefore wanted my design to not only surprise but to also trigger the viewers’ senses. And it did. As much as viewers were repulsed by the idea working with human hair, and wanted to have nothing to do with either my collected human hair or the artificial hair extensions, almost everyone who saw the scarf wanted to touch it—despite knowing that it was made of hair. One even smelled it! When it was perceived as merely a scarf, no one was interested in more than looking; however, when they learned it was made out of hair, more senses were involved and thus more interaction with the design. It became more than just a scarf. However, when they found out it was synthetic hair, their wow declined. It is real, off-the-body human hair, given a form through design, that garners more value.

Simulacra
Printed Scarves

One concept studied in the thesis explored the notion of covering hair with hair. A literal take on the subject was the Braided Hair scarf, designed using braided hair extensions. When exhibited, and when viewers knew the material it was made of, it produced reactions ranging from surprise and admiration to curiosity and interest, or cautiously touching the scarf and even smelling it.

Another interpretation of the concept was using hair in the form of print. Three headscarves were created, two with real hair photos, and one with microscopic images of my own hair, all printed onto fabric and sewn into scarves. Unlike the Braided Hair scarf, these scarves didn’t get the same reaction from the spectators. When printed, hair lost its grandeur and became no more than a pattern. The magnified images of real hair took the form of an even more abstracted graphical element. Apparently, covering hair with a photo of it allows more acceptance to the point that it is no longer seen as hair, and all connotations, either positive or negative, are lost.
Conclusion

Findings

My aim in this thesis was to reflect on and question the prominence given by society, culture, and religion to human hair that remains on the body, and to transform some of this glory to hair that is discarded, and off the body. This was accomplished by designing pieces made of real human hair, synthetic human hair, and printed images of real hair; thus studying all representations of hair and how each was perceived by the viewer-user.

The first part of my thesis goal—questioning social, cultural and religious values linked to hair—was achieved by designing jewellery pieces and headscarves made and used in unconventional ways. A necklace designed to be worn as a beard highlighted the social gender discrimination and traditionally approved gender roles separating masculinity and femininity. A headscarf created from hair invited contemplation on the practice of covering hair in the Middle East, especially in the Gulf. As critical designs, the intention of the objects was not to discover any answers, but to inspire reflection by the viewer—and they did. The jewellery pieces and headscarf prompted examination upon those gender and cultural-religious values attached to hair in its original setting, and initiated discussion among the spectators. What differentiated these pieces from other human derived designed objects, was that they engaged directly with the user. Bringing hair back to the body to wrap the face and the head in new forms, made it more intimate. It was not just the idea, but also the usage of the objects that gave them originality.

The second intent of this thesis was to transform some of this glory to hair that is discarded. Accomplishing this goal was not simple. How the hair was presented, and its artificiality or naturalness, played a vital role in achieving the desired glorification, admiration and valuation of hair off the body.

The Hair Rings presented coarse, messy tufts of real human hair. The sentimental, 3D printed rings themselves didn’t garner as much attention and intrigue as the hair they collected. When I wore them alone without hair, the rings were considered pretty, but when natural human hair was added to the formula, the pretty response was replaced by repulsion. A viewer commented that she wouldn’t mind wearing a hair ring as long as she used it to collect her own hair and no one else’s. Apparently, it is the material human waste of the other that elicits negative feelings, and not the material itself.

In addition to rings, two necklaces were designed: the Beard-Chest Necklace, made from felted real human hair, and the Crown-Beard-Chest Necklace, created from synthetic African textured hair. (For easier reading, I will refer to them as Beard necklace and Crown necklace.) The Crown necklace, when presented as natural hair, earned admiration from viewers, but this admiration waned when they realized the hair was actually artificial. They favored instead the Beard necklace—previously considered less aesthetic. However, the less refined Beard necklace made of unpolished raw hair blobs proved more intriguing, provoking feelings of cautious admiration as well as a curiosity to feel and touch the spherical hairballs.

Finally, my thesis explored another dimension of hair. Printed images of human hair, in addition to magnified images of my own, were applied to three scarves. I had expected the magnified prints to be the most applauded by spectators, but to my surprise, none of the printed scarves remotely evoked the emotions that the braided hair scarf did.

In this exploration, I learned that, when treated as a simulacra, hair became less interesting. None of the feelings induced by real hair—glorification or revulsion—were experienced by viewers when encountering representations of hair, such as printed images or synthetics. Hair was only important when it came from human beings; there is something about its connection to the body that gives it its halo.

Another thing I realized is that the feelings of admiration, intrigue or aversion depended on the way the hair was presented. Although both the hair blobs and the tuft of hair used on the rings were both genuine human hair, the latter was perceived as disgusting, while the former intrigued the viewer. Seemingly, the neater the hair was, and the more it resembled something else, the more it was accepted. The hair scarf and crown necklace attracted viewers; the beard hair blob necklace intrigued them; but the hair on the sentimental 3D printed rings repelled viewers. Even a wig used for presentation purposes aroused disgust. But isn’t this also the case when hair still remains on the body? Only well-kept hair is admired as a symbol of beauty and seduction; few are seduced by a beggar’s dirty, shaggy hair. Although the meanings linked to hair were represented by these objects, the feelings linked to hair were transferred to them—not because of the objects themselves, but by the way the hair was presented.

In this exploration, I learned that, when treated as a simulacra, hair became less interesting. None of the feelings induced by real hair—glorification or revulsion—were experienced by viewers when encountering representations of hair, such as printed images or synthetics. Hair was only important when it came from human beings; there is something about its connection to the body that gives it its halo.

Another thing I realized is that the feelings of admiration, intrigue or aversion depended on the way the hair was presented. Although both the hair blobs and the tuft of hair used on the rings were both genuine human hair, the latter was perceived as disgusting, while the former intrigued the viewer. Seemingly, the neater the hair was, and the more it resembled something else, the more it was accepted. The hair scarf and crown necklace attracted viewers; the beard hair blob necklace intrigued them; but the hair on the sentimental 3D printed rings repelled viewers. Even a wig used for presentation purposes aroused disgust. But isn’t this also the case when hair still remains on the body? Only well-kept hair is admired as a symbol of beauty and seduction; few are seduced by a beggar’s dirty, shaggy hair. Although the meanings linked to hair were represented by these objects, the feelings linked to hair were transferred to them—not because of the objects themselves, but by the way the hair was presented.
Future Direction

In this thesis, hair as a material was used to raise cultural, social and religious perspectives mostly in the Arab-Islamic region, where those views and beliefs are given great value and importance.

In the future, I would like to further study and reflect upon my culture and that of the Arab world. Hopefully, I would pursue this by combining my design skills with different fields, teaming up with scientists, doctors, and perhaps engineers. My brief experiment with nano-particles, with the help of VCU Professor Dr Khalid Saoud, made me realize the great possibilities and outcomes one could achieve with science.

Hair may or may not be the medium, but designing something from the human to the human remains an interesting approach.

Credits

• A.N.D TRADING CO.
• Nails
• Franck Provost Paris
• Jean Louis David
Bibliography


VCU Qatar

*Thesis Exhibition*
Studio Droog, Amsterdam

**Seven Little Wonders**

The Braided Hair Scarf was chosen by curator Renney Remakers, co-founder and director of design company Droog, to be exhibited at Hotel Droog, Amsterdam. Below is the press release.

---

**Seven little wonders**

date: Dec 11 - Jan 13, 2013
location: Hotel Droog

Seven apple trees stood in the Droog Gallery. With this exhibition they were joined by seven topical projects from the world of art and design. Each project touched—in a modest and often poetic way—something in the news, such as increasing violence in schools, the much-discussed headscarf for Islamic culture and the issue of national identity. Some of the works on display include the animation One Past Two by Aïmée de Jongh, a selection of works from Identity Land by Droog Lab with Erik Kessels, Wild Bone China by Christien Meindertsma for Droog Lab, a headscarf of braided hair by Rania Chamsine and a humidifier that doesn’t require electricity by Minghshuo Zhang.