

Grief Becomes Her: Fashion Connections in *Daemon & Saudade*

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Abstract

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This essay will present a portion of a body of artwork entitled *Daemon & Saudade* that was exhibited at the Art Gallery of Northumberland in Cobourg, Ontario from November 15th, 2018, through January 13th, 2019. Photography, fashion, textiles, and jewellery were used in the creation of this interdisciplinary work to explore stories of grief, loss, and the careful crafting of identity. Images and wearable sculptures document time, emotion, and circumstance as they convey personal narratives derived from journaling and sketching. Acrylic and ceramic mourning jewellery show the physical embod-

iment and beautification of emotion through embellished personal tokens that forever link fashion and grief. The work in *Daemon & Saudade* demonstrates a role that fashion plays in articulating identity, allowing us to choose what we reveal or conceal and even to mask the experiences and emotions of our daily lives to those closest to us. Collectively, it captures and preserves the marks left on us by the experiences we live. Whether it is the loss of a loved one or a relationship, grief is a condition, a state, an emotion, and a process we all share.

GRIEF BECOMES HER – FASHION CONNECTIONS IN *DAEMON & SAUDADE*

Figure 1. *Daemon & Saudade* exhibition, Art Gallery of Northumberland, 2018. © Schindler-Lynch

This essay presents a portion of a body of work entitled *Daemon & Saudade* that was exhibited at the Art Gallery of Northumberland in Cobourg, Ontario from November 15th 2018 through January 13th 2019 (Figure 1). In this exhibition, embellished truths detail intimate accounts, while discrete representations of ephemeral events such as conversations and memories were translated into artworks. This research utilizes dress and semiotics as it comments on identity, and tells stories through images and wearable sculptures. Fashion is pervasive. It infiltrates and intersects with every aspect of life, and here, it is also used to speak through metaphors about loss and death.

In *Daemon & Saudade*, I engaged with the public through a non-textual form of communication: an art exhibit. Visual metaphors impart fragments of my stories, which are meant to connect with and prompt people to relate their own experiences about grief and loss on a personal level. Through-

out the creation of the work, fugitive events and transient recollections were documented through processes such as journaling and photographing, before they fleetingly dissolve into gossamer-thin memories over time.

My work is interdisciplinary and autobiographical, disclosing personal narratives that evolve from issues of identity, memory, and experiences shared with others. I sought to connect with a public that I would not physically meet, and through the work, ask them how my stories could intersect with their stories, how grief and loss affected them, and how close to the surface those memories remain. The query in making and exhibiting this body of work, was to ask the following: could a connection be made to a community at large that had not considered grief and loss through fashion as a lens and vehicle? Collectively this practice explores emotion, grief, loss, and preservation through a series of photographic prints, sculptural garments,

and jewellery. The work fostered a resonant experience, and that resonance was intended to provoke dialogue by stirring memories and emotions, creating an exchange that might be an inner or outer discourse with the viewer. Grief is intimate and highly personal, yet it is something we collectively experience. Using my narrative as an access point for discourse on the subject allowed the creation of work that speaks with a personal voice while at the same time remaining relatable to the public. The use of text on the didactic panel, in both the catalogue and descriptive labelling, actuates the material for viewers and provides access to content of the work.

The title of the exhibit, *Daemon & Saudade*, represents two distinct concepts. “daemon” refers to both an archaic spelling of the word demon, and indicates that something is going on behind the scenes; it is also associated with a computer program that runs in the background and is beyond the user’s control (Stevenson). Adapted and re-contextualized, the use of the word daemon in the title relates to the unknown. For example, we lost my father in five short weeks. We knew something wasn’t right. There was something else going on, of which we were not aware. Slowly, beneath detection, disease was growing inside him — a demon of sorts.

The second part of the title uses a Portuguese word, *saudade*. Some words are just missing from the English language — words that convey depth, meaning, and sentiment. “*Saudade*” is one of those words. It refers to the love that remains after someone is gone. Initially, this could be understood as when a loved one has passed. A broader interpretation of the subtlety of the word might include a different kind of grief: when a relationship has come to an end, for example.

Saudade encompasses feelings and experiences, emptiness and absence, nostalgia, and melancholy. It is an emotional state that brings both sad and happy feelings together. Paired together, “daemon” and “*saudade*” communicate an intricate complexity of physical, emotional, and mental states.

The sentiments of personal grief and loss in this exhibition are heavily influenced by the painfully visceral work of Columbian artist, Doris Salcedo, whose artwork gives voice to victims of violence both personal and cultural. Salcedo’s work comments on loss and grief that is both collective and individual at the same time — a sense of loss that is palpable. In *Untitled*, a series of sculptures created in the 1990s, Salcedo juxtaposed hybrid domestic objects constructed of mismatched furniture filled with concrete. They are enduring, smothering, behemoth objects, where delicate articles of clothing and belongings rise to the surface of the concrete. In *Atrabiliarios*, Salcedo encased shoes in walls, visually filtering them through stretched animal fiber sutured to the dry-wall. They eerily speak of the quiet after death. In a video documenting Salcedo’s artist talk for her *Retrospective* exhibition in 2015 at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, she refers to her struggle representing contradictions such as “silence and utterance” (16:28–16:53) and a desire to create art that allows her to actualize the life experience of the victims of violence in a new way. Her work communicates grief on a grand scale using poetics to convey loss through detached emotion, and uses fashion as a point of connection with memory and the unknown subject. In the video, Salcedo specifically mentions “The memory of experience always vanishing” (Guggenheim Museum 25:28–25:40).

PHOTOGRAPHS

We live and relive impermanent pictures, events, emotions, and experiences that are edited with each successive recollection in quiet and unsuspecting ways. In *Forget Me Not, Photography and Remembrance*, Geoffery Batchen speaks of the distinctly different functions of photographs and memory. A picture is a documented moment in time, but it is the memory that infuses emotion and sentiment (Batchen 1-5). For example, the photograph itself is an enduring object, but the memory associated with the person or event in the photograph is malleable, and shifts, often lost to time.

Photographs in the exhibit recreate the look of historical tintype photos and the distressed edges of glass negatives, but at a scale impossible to achieve with the original technique (Figure 2). They relate a sense of nostalgia, making use of the visual language of history to make connections between old and new and recall a time of slow documentation and close inspection — a time when images were precious objects.



Figure 2. *Set Aside*, 2018, archival digital photographs, series of 3, approx. 98x40 inches. © Schindler-Lynch

JEWELLERY

The jewellery in the exhibition speaks to the preciousness of memory through objects and keepsakes. Stories are not typically experienced through touch. However, in my piece entitled *Well Worn/Worn Well*, individual words were manipulated to create lace-like motifs; this story has been given a tactile presence (Figure 3). The written material relays a personal narrative, derived from the practice of journaling, cataloging a period of time, along with the events and emotions that coincided. Strung together, yet separate from the typical structure of sentences, these detached words collectively communicate emotion, time, place, and elements we associate with narrative structure. On one level, a narrative string quietly relays its message while on the surface, motifs are linked together with

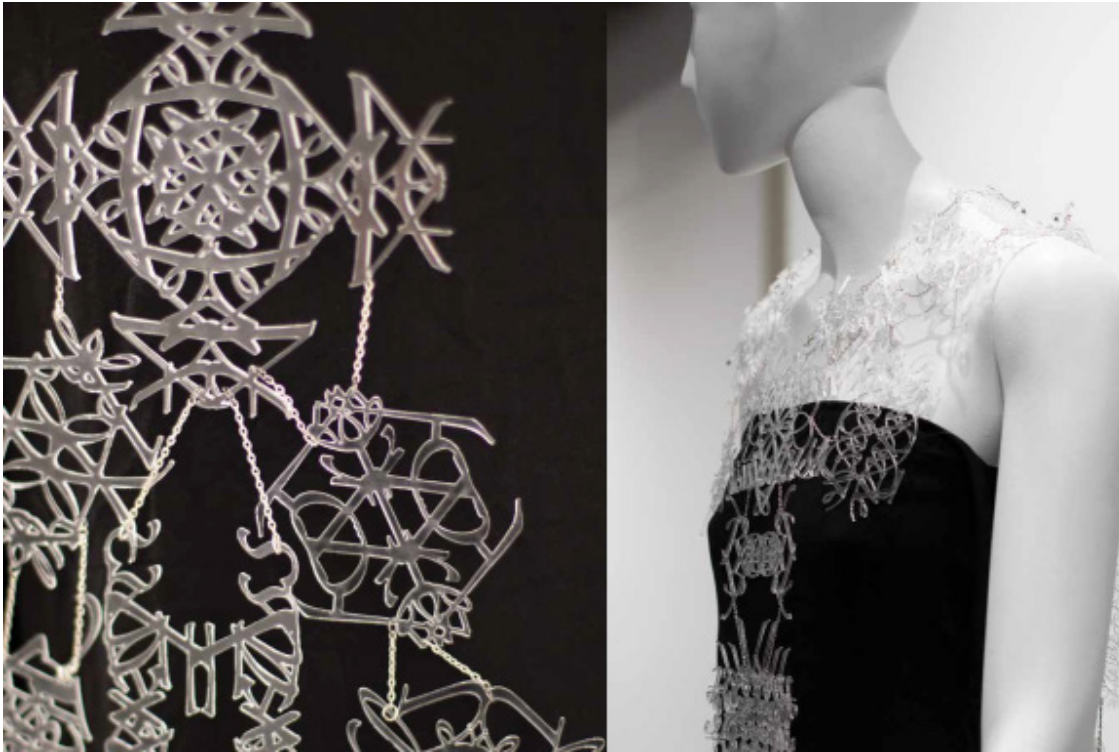


Figure 3. Detail of *Well Worn / Worn Well* 2016, laser-cut acrylic and silver. © Schindler-Lynch

sharp, fragile, and delicate forms. Viewers may initially think they are just looking at a lovely lace necklace, later realizing that there are messages hidden in plain sight.

Clues are presented through symbolic images, and the viewer is left to decode the motifs in order to become acquainted with the person behind the story. Wearable memento mori and sentimental jewellery were popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Victorians were famous for the creation of artifacts that commemorated lost loved ones; keepsakes fused with sentimentality for both the living and the departed used codified symbols to convey thoughts of death, the afterlife, and lessons for the living (Harmeyer; Holm; Hunter). In *Sentimental Cuts: Eighteenth-Century Mourning Jewelry*

with Hair, Christiane Holm talks about hidden communication in wearable adornment:

The ambiguous structure of revealed function and hidden story is condensed in the jewelry because it exposes the value of the object and connects it to the intimate sphere of the body. So the wearer of remembrance jewelry presents herself as a participant in a hidden intimate network, from which other viewers are excluded. Mourning jewels are exhibited secrets. (140)

Mementos were fashioned as bracelets, rings, brooches, and other objects to be worn or kept close. In *Daemon & Saudade*, the pieces, *Rooster Pooster*, *Well Worn/Worn Well*, *Suppressed Histories*, and *Toska* are interpretations of this mode of adornment expressing grief and loss through the lens of contemporary art wear.

The black acrylic used for *Rooster Pooster* and *Suppressed Histories* references the use of jet in Victorian mourning jewellery, which “as a symbol of mourning...remained[ed] fashionable until the late Victorian period” (Hunter 16-17; Figure 4).



Figure 4. *Rooster Pooster*, 2018, acrylic and metal. *Suppressed Histories*, 2018, acrylic. © Schindler-Lynch

The ceramic series *Toska* represents a tradition of carrying small, devotional items with images of loved ones, conveying messages of comfort and affection (Figure 5). These fashionable statement pieces use imagery such as stylized roosters, tattoos, and tears, along with excerpts from my journal, to give a tactile presence to the beauty and pain of emotion. As with their historical counterparts, this work is intended to remind the wearer of absence. Robin Frank Jaffee wrote of the importance and usage of the portrait miniature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in his text *Love and Loss: American Portrait and Mourning Miniatures*: “Men carried portraits of their lovers, wives, children, and friends in a coat, vest, or breeches pocket, at the waist in closed cases together with seals and watches, or as a pendant around their necks but hidden under an intricately knotted cravat or other neckcloth” (15). Jaffee notes that miniatures were portable; “Whereas the oil painting would have adorned the home, the miniatures would have accompanied its inhabitants wherever they went” (22).

SCULPTURE

The last series found in *Daemon and Saudade* I will discuss, is a collection of five soft sculptures in the form of garments. When clothing functions beyond the fundamental purposes of providing warmth and protection for the wearer, it can be a vehicle for communication. In *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, Elizabeth Wilson succinctly summarizes the role of dress; “In all societies the body is ‘dressed,’ and everywhere dress and adornment play symbolic, communicative and aesthetic roles” (3). This three-fold purpose is evident in the garment sculptures of *Daemon and Saudade*. This clothing has the potential to speak in a multitude



Figure 5. Details of *Toska*, hand-painted ceramic, metal, organza. © Schin-

of ways whether printed, stitched, camouflaged, or blatantly plastered as slogans. In *Daemon & Saudade*, fashion is used as a vehicle to connect with the viewer. The series of dresses utilizes the ubiquitous sheath. The simple silhouette gives the work an outward appearance anchored in daily routine while camouflaging the many ways one copes and carries on in the face of grief and trauma. These dresses use the dimensional surface of the body to relay a wearable narrative that fuses textiles, fashion, and art and communicate much more through their treatment, their adornment, and their colouration. The dresses communicate the unspoken and bring to the surface that which the dress hopes to conceal.

Influenced by Canadian performance artist and photographer Suzy Lake, the use of the body as a potential canvas is evident in this suite of constructed garments (Figure 6). During her conversation with curators, Sophie Hackett and Georgiana Uhlyarik of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Lake describes her reaction to the design of the garment she wears in two large-scale photographs entitled *Performing Haute Couture #1 and #2*: “The architectural elements of the garments really just begged movement, [and] to be able to perform a movement activating the garment...” (Art Gallery of Ontario 3:11–3:21). Using her body as canvas and subject, she animates the inanimate suit. Lake stands still and remains in focus while she moves her arm to communicate in concert with the construction detail on the sleeve of a *Comme des Garçons* jacket. Her use of the body as an object to be manipulated and controlled communicates and challenges issues of ageism, definitions of beauty, and feminism. The output of her work is photographic, but performance remains integral. Although the suite of garments in *Daemon & Saudade* are static, the dresses are objects, more than documentation after the fact. As objects they convey the perception of wearability and functionality and through this they imply a performative quality, which is about maintaining composure.



Figure 6. Detail of sculptural garments from *Daemon & Saudade*, 2018. © Schindler-Lynch

Collectively, the garments in *Daemon & Saudade* represent different kinds of grief, sometimes within the same sculpture. The series represents health and illness, physical and emotional scarring and healing, tipping points where decisions need to be made, and strength above all.

In addition to the silhouette, the use of hair as part of the garments is a second common element. Hair is fast-growing, and so it is one of the first indicators of illness and health. It has been used in several of the garments in different ways to represent sickness (without colour) and health (with colour). The hair is affixed to their

respective dresses in different ways; on one garment, dark, healthy hair flows down the back, while another has a precise “surgical” incision, through which the hair is secured with hand embroidery. Its treatment on these garments references the hairwork of 19th century sentimental jewellery. On a third garment, a contrasting wound is roughly torn and frayed, and clumps of silver hair are stuffed through. Both a benevolent intervention and an extreme act of extraction, surgery and its resultant scars leave permanent reminders of illness and are permanent sources of grief. The following paragraphs detail the symbols depicted on each garment.



Figure 7. Detail of badges in *Hye Won Hye*, 2018, wool, satin, polyester.
© Schindler-Lynch

HYE WON HYE (DRESS 1)

Dress 1 is entitled *Hye Won Hye*, a West-African term that speaks to the tenacity and strength of an individual (Figure 7). This dress proudly presents a sash covered in machine-embroidered badges, displaying a series of personal symbols (Figure 8). Collectively they represent physical, mental, and emotional endurance in the face of hardship. The work references the ritual in Girl Guides and Boy Scouts of earning badges for passing a series of tests, then wearing them proudly as outwardly public symbols of survival and accomplishment.



Figure 8. Close-up of badges in *Hye Won Hye*, 2018, wool, satin, polyester. © Schindler-Lynch

XO SKELETON (DRESS 2)

In *Daemon and Saudade*, impressions of grief were depicted as an exoskeleton — a metaphorical outer layer extending beyond the body to protect the emotional state of the wearer. An exoskeleton is usually a hard, outer shell intended to protect its host physically, but here it is flimsy and ineffective. The laser-etched acetate is emblematic of protection while simultaneously revealing a struggle to camouflage emotion and maintain outward composure (Figure 9 and Figure 10). The title also plays with the common “XO” symbol, representing affection through a hug and a kiss.

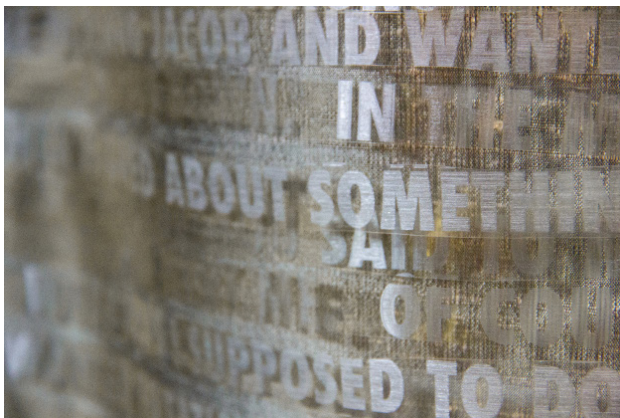


Figure 10. Close-up of *XO Skeleton*, 2018, silk and acetate. © Schindler-Lynch.



Figure 9. Detail of *XO Skeleton*, 2018, silk and acetate. © Schindler-Lynch

YOU CAN'T UNRING THE BELL (I)

This dress represents different kinds of the changing state of a relationship in different states of life. The front of the dress features strands of a fictitious necklace, which are woven into the silk velvet. The words from a previous emotionally abusive relationship, “Shut up” repeated. The many ascenders of the letterforms echo the beading and components used in jewelry.

There are long strands of silver hair woven into the dress through incisions in the fabric. This element ties in with the sentiment of the treatment of the back of the garment, which is mourning the loss of a sense of self. The dress reveals a spine constructed out of ten words “Me Too.” The laser-etched fabric is then distressed to the point of disintegration, resulting in a permanent change to the material and stretching the affected area. The fabric has been exposed, and the texture has transformed into a smock-like texture transforming an aspect of beauty (Figure 11).



Figure 11. Detail of *You Can't Unring the Bell*, laser-etched and distressed silk velvet.
© Schindler-Lynch



Figure 12. Detail of *Xinteng*, embroidered silk and human hair. © Schindler-Lynch

XINTENG (DRESS 4)

The title *Xinteng* is derived from a Chinese word that conveys physical, mental, and emotional empathy and speaks to the sentiment of sharing in someone's grief (Figure 12). The fabric dye was initially discharged with thiourea dioxide and then re-dyed the colour of dried blood — the colour of healing. Words from my journal were manipulated and then machine embroidered onto a fabric that was dyed the opposite colour of the material used on the dress. The embroidered words were roughly cut, then hand-stitched across the torso of the garment in order to reference physical and emotional injuries as well as the process of healing (Figure 13). The edges are frayed and curl to represent wounds in a half-state of healing. As scabs start to lift and release from their wounds, they begin to catch and draw atten-



Figure 13. Close up of *Xinteng*, embroidered silk.
© Schindler-Lynch



Figure 14. Close up of *Xinteng*, human hair. © Schindler-Lynch

tion to the trauma area and are a constant irritant. The long strands of hair are healthy, have colour, and are loosely plaited referencing intricate construction techniques used in hairwork mourning jewelry (Figure 14). “Like the miniature portrait and the photographic portrait, hair work was an objectified extension of the body, kept as a personal and sentimental memorial” (Harmeyer 35). Hair was therefore affixed to the body with tiny, blood-red stitches that betray composure by creating small, almost unnoticeable wounds. This dress represents a state of flux — neither sick nor well, happy nor sad, it suggests a space and time between — it is about stasis.



BLACK HEART PAILLETES (DRESS 5)

A paillette is a large sequin and can form an overlapping surface, protecting the fabric below. On this garment, the paillette shapes are in the form of the human heart. They have been laser-etched and cut from black acrylic then hand-stitched to the leather dress. The paillettes resemble charms or military medals and have been affixed in a regimental manner across the shoulder line. They run diagonally across the side of the chest where the heart is located — protecting it below the surface and slowly turning black as it dies. As you move down the dress, the regular placement of the black hearts begin to break apart, and by the hemline, they take the form of bombs dropping, indicating a sealed fate (Figure 15 and Figure 16). The dress asks: at what point do you close your heart off to someone?

Figure 15. The front of the dress *Black Heart Paillettes*, 2018, leather, acrylic, human hair, metal. The back of the dress *You Can't Unring the Bell*, 2018, silk, velvet, human hair. © Schindler-Lynch



Figure 16. Close up of *Black Heart Paillettes*, 2018, leather, acrylic, human hair, metal. © Schindler-Lynch

CONCLUSION

The work discussed here represents only a portion of the artwork shown in *Daemon & Saudade*. Throughout the exhibition, fashion plays a role in carefully crafting identity by allowing us to choose what we reveal or conceal from others and even to mask the experiences and emotions of our daily lives to those closest to us. Lou Taylor said in *The Study of Dress History* that “One of the great voids of dress history, has been its failure to examine emotional responses to clothing and appearance” (102), and later states: “The use of text from personal diaries, letters, and autobiographies related to clothing making, selection, purchase and wearing thus offers another way through to an understanding of the cultural significance of clothing” (103). Through interviews, closet analyses, exhibitions, and books, dress study has often focused on either the garments themselves or the biographical narrative attached to clothing. Projects and books such as *Worn Stories* (Spivack), or exhibitions like *Fashion Unravelled*, which was shown at the Fashion Institute of Technology’s Fashion & Textile History Gallery in 2018 and incorporated the crowd-sourced, social media campaign, Wearing Memories. Wearing Memories included original-state, altered, reused, and repurposed garments. However, intrinsically tied to this approach is the need for a secondary method of communicating narrative. Whether oral or literary, the use of dress as a communicator relies on a narrative to connect with the piece.

By contrast, in *Strange Material: Storytelling through Textiles* (2014), narratives are hosted on garments, blending craft, fashion, textiles, and art. The authors, Prain and Ow, convey extended stories and linked memories that invite resonant experiences. In 2011, Bharti Parmar detailed the creation of her artwork that was infused with extensive research in fashion studies and material culture for her PhD dissertation entitled *A Grammar of Sentiment: Thinking about Sentimental Jewellery towards Making New Art about Love and Loss*. But these examples are not conventional approaches with regard to research and dress. The work in *Daemon & Saudade* therefore contributes to an underrepresented area in communicating ephemeral aspects related to dress in the fields of fashion and dress studies. *Daemon & Saudade* anchors the autobiographical narrative with the story of the maker, but is reliant on the viewer deciphering, translating, and interpreting the object or visual material in front of them. *Daemon & Saudade* presents art that references dress; the absence of the body allows the viewer to envision themselves in the garments; and although they are wearable, they are not actually meant to be worn. Collectively, this work captures and preserves the marks left on us by the experiences we live. Whether it is the loss of a loved one or a relationship, grief is a condition, a state, an emotion, and a process we all share.

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