

FROM SACRED OFFERING TO WEARABLE ART: RECONTEXTUALIZING *SAMPIAN* IN CONTEMPORARY FASHION PRACTICE

By:

I Gede Jaya Putra¹, Vita Wulansari²

¹*Fine Arts Program, Indonesian Institute of the Arts Bali,*

²*Fashion Design Program, Bali Institute of Design and Business*

e-mail:

igedejayaputra@gmail.com

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Abstract

Sampian is a ritual offering element integral to Hindu practices in Bali, carrying symbolic, philosophical, and aesthetic values beyond its devotional function. As contemporary society evolves, traditional objects such as *sampian* are increasingly explored beyond ritual contexts, entering the realms of art and fashion. This study examines the process of recontextualizing *sampian* from a sacred ritual object into wearable art within contemporary fashion, focusing on materiality, sustainability, and the transformation of meaning. Previous studies have addressed *sampian* primarily from the perspectives of ritual function, craft heritage, and traditional aesthetics; however, limited scholarly attention has been paid to its potential recontextualization within contemporary fashion discourse. This gap is significant given the intersection of cultural identity, ethical questions surrounding the use of sacred objects, and the growing discourse on sustainable fashion. Employing a qualitative, practice-based research approach, this study combines literature review, aesthetic and semiotic analysis—drawing on Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics and Barthes' semiotic theory—and direct artistic production. Fieldwork and artwork creation were conducted in Bali between March and May 2022. The findings demonstrate that recontextualizing *sampian* produces distinct aesthetic forms combining woven *janur*, transparent textile, and bodily performance, while simultaneously expanding the object's cultural meaning rather than erasing it. The study argues that this transformation is ethically viable when grounded in cultural sensitivity, community engagement, and critical reflection, thus distinguishing responsible recontextualization from cultural appropriation.

Keywords: *Sampian*, Recontextualization, Contemporary Fashion, Sustainability, Semiotics, Aesthetics

INTRODUCTION

Sampian is an integral part of *banten* (ritual offerings) in Hindu religious practices in Bali, made from young coconut leaves (*janur*) through intricate and structured weaving techniques. Within ritual contexts, *sampian* functions not merely as a decorative element but as a cosmological symbol representing the relationship between humans (*bhuwana alit*), nature (*bhuwana agung*), and the divine. This concept aligns with the philosophy of Tri Hita Karana, which emphasizes the balance between human beings, nature, and spirituality as the foundation of Balinese life [1]. According to Bandem, aesthetics in Balinese culture cannot be separated from its religious function, making objects such as *sampian* inherently carriers of artistic value

within spiritual practice [2]. In this sense, *sampian* constitutes a form of living art, wherein aesthetic and spiritual values coexist inseparably.

However, modernization has significantly altered *sampian's* production and social position. The emergence of mass production, time efficiency, and commercial demands has led to the widespread creation of instant and traded *sampian*, shifting practices rooted in process and meaning toward those driven by function and consumption. Lansing argues that modernization in Balinese society affects not only social structures but also cultural practices once considered sacred [3]. Consequently, *sampian* risks experiencing a reduction of meaning from a spiritual symbol into a commodified object. Simultaneously, the global fashion industry's environmental burden, which accounts for approximately 10% of worldwide carbon emissions [4], has generated urgent interest in sustainable alternatives that incorporate organic, biodegradable materials such as *janur*.

Previous studies on *sampian* have primarily focused on its ritual function, craft heritage, and aesthetic dimensions within Balinese cultural tradition. Notably, scholarly literature addresses the theological and cosmological framework of Balinese offerings [1][2] and the broader social transformations affecting sacred practices [3]. However, limited research has explored *sampian* as a material for contemporary fashion practice or examined the critical implications of such transformation in terms of cultural identity, sustainability, and ethics. This gap is especially significant given globalization's reshaping of the boundaries between art, craft, and ritual objects, and the growing relevance of practice-based research in art and design scholarship.

An important ethical dimension underlies this inquiry. The use of sacred objects in non-ritual contexts is inherently sensitive, as it raises questions about cultural appropriation versus cultural preservation. This study takes the position that such recontextualization is ethically acceptable under specific conditions namely, when it is grounded in deep cultural knowledge, involves engagement with the Balinese Hindu community, maintains transparency in the artistic narrative, and critically distinguishes creative dialogue from commodification. As Clifford notes, the transformation of cultural artifacts into new contexts risks detaching them from their original meaning [12]; therefore, responsible recontextualization requires both critical awareness and cultural sensitivity. The study does not advocate for unrestricted appropriation, but argues for a reflexive practice that honors the sacred while enabling meaningful aesthetic and conceptual exploration.

This study therefore, seeks to examine how *sampian* can be recontextualized within contemporary fashion practices through a practice-based approach, and how this process influences the transformation of meaning, aesthetic value, and cultural positioning of the object. The following conceptual frameworks, Relational Aesthetics and Barthesian semiotics, are integrated within the introduction to anchor the analytical perspective: Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics positions artworks as generators of social relations across cultural contexts [9], while Barthes' semiotic framework allows analysis of how meaning at the levels of denotation, connotation, and myth shifts when *sampian* moves from ritual to fashion space [13]. Taken together, these frameworks support the argument that recontextualization can expand, rather than erase, the cultural meaning of sacred objects.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

1. Contemporary Fashion and the Use of New Materials (Waste)

Contemporary fashion has evolved into a medium for social and ecological critique, particularly in response to the environmental impact of the fashion industry. The global fashion industry is estimated to contribute approximately 10% of worldwide carbon emissions and generate a significant amount of textile waste annually [4]. This condition has encouraged the emergence of alternative practices such as sustainable fashion and upcycling.

Upcycling, as explained by Fletcher and Grose, refers to the process of transforming waste materials into products of higher value without degrading the material quality [5]. In fashion practice, this approach not only produces aesthetically compelling works but also introduces a conceptual dimension that critiques systems of mass production and consumption.

A relevant example can be found in the work of Martin Margiela through the fashion house Maison Margiela, which is widely recognized for its deconstructive approach and the use of discarded materials as primary design elements. Margiela frequently reconstructs everyday objects such as used leather gloves—into new garments. In this practice, materials function not merely as physical components but also as carriers of narratives related to origin, use, and transformation.



Figure 1. Karya Fashion Upcycling Maison Margiela
[Sumber : Vita Wulansari, Maret 2022]

This work demonstrates that the process of upcycling does not merely transform the physical form of materials but also reshapes how those materials are interpreted and understood. Gloves, which were originally functional everyday objects, are reconstructed into garments, thus undergoing a shift from utilitarian function to aesthetic and conceptual function. As noted by Evans, Margiela's deconstructive practice can be understood as a critique of the conventional fashion system, which tends to be homogeneous and rooted in mass production [8].

In this context, Margiela's approach becomes relevant to the exploration of *sampian* in this study. *Sampian*, which initially functions as part of ritual practice and subsequently becomes waste, holds a similar potential to be reconstructed into fashion works. Therefore, similar to the use of discarded materials in Margiela's work, *sampian* is not merely positioned as an alternative material but as a medium that carries cultural meaning and opens up new possibilities for interpretation within contemporary fashion.

2. Recontextualization of *Sampian* from Sacred Object to Wearable Art

Recontextualization is the process by which an object is transferred from its original context into a new context, thereby generating new meanings [9]. In contemporary art discourse, this process is often employed to critique, reinterpret, or expand the meaning of cultural objects.

In the case of *sampian*, recontextualization occurs when an object originally used in religious rituals is repositioned within the context of fashion as wearable art. This

transformation involves changes in function, materiality, as well as the perception of the object itself. Conceptually, the use of *sampian* in fashion can be understood through several stages:

a. Decontextualization

Sampian is detached from its ritual function and redefined as a visual and material object. At this stage, aesthetic values such as pattern, texture, and structure become the primary focus.

b. Material Reinterpretation

The materiality of *sampian*, particularly *janur* (young coconut leaves), which is organic and biodegradable, is repositioned as a form of ritual waste. In this context, *sampian* shares similarities with upcycled materials in contemporary fashion practices.



Figure 2. Peneliti dan Sampian yang akan digunakan sebagai Karya Fashion
[Sumber : Vita Wulansari, Maret 2022]

c. Artistic Reconstruction

Sampian is then reworked into new forms, such as garments or accessories, while retaining its distinctive visual characteristics. This process creates a hybrid condition between tradition and innovation, where traditional elements are not simply preserved, but actively transformed within a contemporary design framework.

d. Production of New Meaning

In the context of contemporary fashion, the transformation of *sampian* from a ritual object into wearable art does not merely represent a change in function, but also generates complex layers of meaning. *Sampian* is no longer understood solely as a spiritual offering, but as a medium that embodies multiple conceptual dimensions, including cultural identity, critique of fashion consumption, sustainability practices, and contemporary aesthetic exploration.

First, as a representation of cultural identity, the use of *sampian* in fashion can be seen as an articulation of local identity within a global context. In the era of globalization, fashion practices are often dominated by Western aesthetics, making the integration of traditional elements such as *sampian* a strategy for both preserving and representing cultural identity. Crane argues that fashion is a significant medium in the construction of social and cultural identity [11]. In this sense, when *sampian* is incorporated into fashion, it functions as a marker of identity that connects the wearer's body to a specific cultural narrative, particularly that of Balinese tradition.

Second, *sampian* in fashion can also be interpreted as a critique of consumption within the modern fashion industry, particularly in relation to fast fashion. The global fashion system is characterized by mass production, rapid trend cycles, and the exploitation of resources and labor [4]. In this context, the use of *sampian* which is handmade, temporary, and rooted in ritual acts as a form of resistance to industrial logic. By reusing materials that were previously considered to have no economic value after ritual use, this practice disrupts the linear consumption model (produce–consume–discard) and replaces it with a more reflective and conceptual approach.

Third, the use of *sampian* in fashion is closely related to sustainability practices. After being used in rituals, *sampian* typically becomes organic waste. However, through upcycling approaches, this material can be transformed into fashion products with added value. Fletcher emphasizes that sustainability in fashion is not only about material selection, but also about rethinking the lifecycle of products [5]. In this regard, *sampian* offers an alternative cyclical model, in which materials do not end as waste, but become part of an ongoing creative process.

Fourth, from the perspective of contemporary aesthetic exploration, *sampian* presents unique visual potential through its woven structures, repetitive patterns, and formal complexity. These characteristics enable unconventional design explorations within fashion. In contemporary art discourse, aesthetics is no longer limited to formal beauty, but also encompasses process, context, and the narratives embedded within objects [9]. Thus, the use of *sampian* in fashion not only produces new visual forms but also expands the aesthetic language through the integration of tradition and material experimentation.

This transformation of meaning can be understood through Arthur C. Danto's concept of "art as context transformation," in which a change in context fundamentally alters how an object is perceived and interpreted [10]. In this case, *sampian*, when transferred from a ritual space into the realm of fashion, undergoes an ontological shift from a sacred object to an aesthetic and conceptual one. However, it is important to note that the original meaning of *sampian* is not entirely lost, but rather expanded. In other words, *sampian* in fashion embodies a dual meaning as both a cultural artifact and a contemporary artwork.

Nevertheless, this process of recontextualization is not free from ethical concerns. The use of sacred objects within profane contexts has the potential to generate cultural tension, particularly if undertaken without a sufficient understanding of the spiritual and social values embedded in the object. As Clifford suggests, the transformation of cultural artifacts into new contexts often risks detaching them from their original meaning and may lead to forms of cultural appropriation [12]. Therefore, the recontextualization of *sampian* must be approached with critical awareness and cultural sensitivity.

Such an ethical approach can be realized through several strategies, including the involvement of local communities in the creative process, a deep understanding of the symbolic meanings of *sampian*, and transparency in the narrative of the work. In this way, recontextualization does not become a form of cultural exploitation, but rather a space for dialogue that respects both tradition and contemporary practice.

Methodology

This study employs a *qualitative, practice-based research* (PBR) approach, which is appropriate for inquiries in which artistic production constitutes both the primary method and the primary site of knowledge generation. Practice-based research positions the researcher as both creator and analyst, enabling reflection on process, materiality, and meaning as they emerge through making [6][7]. This methodology is particularly suitable for the present study, as the recontextualization of *sampian* is investigated not only theoretically but also through the direct creation of fashion artworks.

1. Research Design

The research design integrates three complementary methodological components: literature review, theoretical-analytical inquiry, and artistic practice. Table 1 summarizes the key components of the research design.

Table 1. Research Design Summary

Component	Description
Type of Research	Qualitative practice-based research
Research Object	<i>Sampian</i> (ritual offering made from young coconut leaves) as a fashion material
Research Subject	The researcher as an artist-researcher and sample-based fashion works
Location & Time	Art studio and gallery space in Bali; March–May 2022
Data Collection	Literature review, artwork documentation, observation of the creative process, and artistic reflection
Data Analysis	Aesthetic analysis (Relational Aesthetics – Bourriaud) and semiotic analysis (Barthes: denotation, connotation, myth)

2. Research Stages



The research was conducted in four systematic stages, as described below.

Preparation and Literature Review: An extensive review of literature was conducted covering Balinese ritual aesthetics, the philosophy of Tri Hita Karana, contemporary fashion theory (sustainable and upcycling practices), Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics, and Barthes' semiotics. This stage also involved selection and documentation of sampian specimens from post-ritual waste collected in Bali (March 2022).

Material Exploration and Artistic Production: Hands-on material experiments were conducted in the studio to explore the structural, tactile, and visual properties of used sampian (janur). Two wearable art pieces were created: (1) *Self Portrait* a garment worn by the researcher, combining transparent kebaya with sampian applied to the skirt and headpiece; and (2) *New Born New Life* a gallery installation presenting the sampian-based garment without a body, displayed as a contemplative object. Documentation (photography) was carried out in Bali, May 2022.

Analytical Interpretation: Each artwork was analyzed through two theoretical lenses: Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics (to examine the social and relational dimensions of the work) and Barthes' semiotic framework (to trace the transformation of meaning across denotative, connotative, and mythological levels). This analytical stage connected artistic outcomes to the broader conceptual argument of the study.

Reflective Evaluation and Writing: Findings were evaluated through critical self-reflection on the ethical and cultural implications of the recontextualization process. The research was documented and written up in accordance with the journal's academic conventions.

[Stage 1: Literature Review & Material Selection] → [Stage 2: Artistic Production] → [Stage 3: Analytical Interpretation] → [Stage 4: Reflective Evaluation & Writing]

Figure 3. Research Stage Diagram
Source: Vita Wulansari, 2026

3. Data Collection

Data were gathered through three complementary methods. First, library research was used to compile theoretical and contextual foundations from published books, journal articles, and institutional reports. Second, artistic documentation was employed throughout the production process, capturing material exploration, garment construction, and exhibition installation through photography. Third, reflective observation was conducted as the researcher engaged in the making process, drawing on artist-led inquiry to generate insights about materiality, meaning, and process.

4. Data Analysis

Analysis was conducted through a dual-framework approach. The relational aesthetics framework (Bourriaud [9]) was applied to examine how the artworks generate social and intercultural relationships through their formal and contextual properties. Barthes' semiotic theory [13] was applied to trace shifts in *sampian's* meaning from its denotative (literal), connotative (cultural), and mythological (ideological) dimensions as it moves from the ritual context into the space of fashion and gallery art. Analytical interpretation was cross-referenced with documented processes to ensure coherence between practice and theory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Research Findings

Artwork: "Sacred Reconstruction: Sampian as Wearable Art in Contemporary Space" This study produced two wearable artworks as its primary research outcomes: *Self Portrait* (2022) and *New Born – New Life* (2022). Both works were created using post-ritual *sampian* (janur-based ritual waste) combined with transparent textile and decorative elements. The following

describes each work and its visual and material characteristics before proceeding to theoretical analysis.

This work represents an artistic exploration that recontextualizes sampian from a ritual object into a medium within contemporary fashion and installation art practices. By utilizing used sampian materials (ritual waste) combined with transparent textiles and decorative elements, the work establishes a dialogue between sacredness, materiality, and contemporary aesthetics.

This approach does not merely focus on the transformation of form, but also on the transformation of meaning generated through shifts in context and usage. The repositioning of sampian from a ritual setting into an artistic and fashion context allows the material to be reinterpreted, not only as a physical component but also as a conceptual medium that carries layered cultural and symbolic significance.

The work presents a garment worn by a model in a frontal pose, set against a background of an ornamental carpet rich in symmetrical patterns and contrasting colors. The garment consists of a combination of a transparent white *kebaya* and additional structural elements made from *sampian*, applied to the skirt and headpiece.

The *sampian* material retains much of its original form, including woven *janur* elements, floral ornaments, and its distinctive radial structure. This preservation of the original visual characteristics emphasizes the continuity between its ritual origin and its transformation into a fashion context, allowing the material to carry both its traditional identity and its newly constructed aesthetic function.

Self Portrait is an adhesive photographic work (100 x 80 cm, 2 pieces) presenting the researcher as wearer of a garment composed of a transparent white *kebaya* and *sampian* structural elements applied to the skirt and headpiece. The *sampian* material retains its original woven form—including floral ornaments and a distinctive radial structure—while being repositioned as wearable fashion. The model (researcher) appears in a frontal pose against a background of ornamental carpet with symmetrical patterns, and the pose evokes a gesture resembling prayer (clasped hands), introducing deliberate ambiguity between ritual performance and artistic representation.



Figure 2. Art Work 1 & 2

[Sumber : Vita Wulansari, Mei 2022]

Self Potrait; Adhesive Photo; 100 x 80 cm (2 Pieces); 2022

Newborn – New Life is presented as a gallery installation in which the *sampian*-based garment is displayed without a human body, positioned as a contemplative object in an

exhibition space. This work shifts the garment from a functional mode (wearable, embodied) to a representational mode (displayed, symbolic). The title references the concept of "rebirth," in which *sampian*—previously used in ritual and subsequently discarded—is given new existence as a visual artifact that carries sustained cultural meaning.



Figure 3. Penempatan karya dalam ruang galeri
[Sumber : Vita Wulansari, Mei 2025]

Collectively, these works demonstrate that recontextualization does not require the destruction or wholesale transformation of *sampian's* material identity. Rather, by retaining the object's original visual vocabulary woven *janur*, floral structure, radial geometry while transferring it into the body and gallery space, the works construct a visual dialogue between the sacred and the contemporary.

2. Discussion: Relational Aesthetics Analysis

Analyzed through Bourriaud's theory of Relational Aesthetics [9], both works function not merely as aesthetic objects but as relational media that generate interactions across multiple contexts. Three relational dimensions are identifiable. First, the relationship between body and culture: the model's body becomes the activating medium through which *sampian* is transferred from ritual stasis into dynamic performativity. What was previously fixed in ceremonial practice becomes animated by the presence and gesture of the human body, establishing a live connection among the wearer, the material, and the Balinese cultural narrative.

Second, the relationship between tradition and modernity: the combination of kebaya (traditional Balinese attire) with transparent plastic material and experimental composition creates a hybrid visual space that negotiates past and present. This hybridity is not a contradiction but a productive tension, reflecting *sampian's* liminal condition situated between the sacred and the profane, the ritual and the aesthetic [9][10].

Third, the relationship between artwork and audience: the prayer-like pose in Self Portrait introduces interpretive ambiguity, inviting audiences to oscillate between reading the work as ritual enactment and as a contemporary fashion statement. This ambiguity is intentional; it does not resolve the tension between the sacred and the aesthetic but opens space for dialogue. In New Born New Life, the absence of the body further shifts the register: without a wearer, the garment becomes purely contemplative, inviting symbolic interpretation rather than embodied experience.

This relational dimension also carries intercultural implications. By making visible the aesthetics of Balinese ritual within a global fashion and gallery context, the works create opportunities for international audiences to encounter local cultural values through the medium of wearable art, generating what Bourriaud describes as a "social interstice," a space for new forms of cultural relation [9].

3. Discussion: Semiotic Analysis

Analyzed through Roland Barthes' semiotic theory [13], the recontextualization of *sampian* can be traced across three levels of meaning.

At the denotative level, *sampian* is a woven arrangement of janur (young coconut leaves) used as a ritual offering in Balinese Hindu practices. In its recontextualized form as garment or gallery object, art becomes a material/design element within a fashion piece. The literal transformation is from offering to clothing/installation.

At the connotative level, *sampian* originally embodies symbolic meanings including purity, cosmic harmony, and the spiritual relationship between humans and the divine. When transferred into fashion, these connotations are not erased but transformed: the garment carries meanings of cultural identity, sustainability (through material upcycling), and resistance to industrial fashion logic. The absence of the body in *New Born New Life* further introduces a connotation of "loss of function," emphasizing a shift from utilitarian to symbolic register.

At the mythological level, *sampian* in contemporary fashion generates new cultural myths, most notably, *sampian* as a symbol of eco-conscious fashion (emphasizing biodegradable, upcycled materials) and as a representation of local cultural identity asserting itself within global fashion discourse [11]. Simultaneously, the work constructs a countermyth to the dominant narrative of fashion as pure consumption [4][5]: by using ritual waste as a medium, it proposes an alternative cyclical model in which materials do not end as waste but re-enter creative and cultural life.

This process of re-signification (Barthes [13]) demonstrates that fashion does not function merely as an aesthetic practice but as a complex and ideological sign system. Danto's concept of "art as context transformation" [10] further illuminates this point: by transferring *sampian* from a ritual space to the realms of fashion and gallery art, the object undergoes an ontological shift from sacred offering to aesthetic and conceptual object. Crucially, however, its original meanings are not annulled but expanded, such that *sampian* in fashion embodies a dual identity: cultural artifact and contemporary artwork simultaneously.

4. Ethical Considerations

The recontextualization of sacred objects necessitates explicit ethical reflection. This study takes a clear position: the transformation of *sampian* into wearable art is ethically acceptable under specific conditions that distinguish respectful creative dialogue from cultural commodification. These conditions include: (1) deep understanding of the symbolic and spiritual values embedded in *sampian*; (2) involvement of the Balinese Hindu community in the creative process, or at minimum, substantive consultation; (3) transparency in the artistic narrative clearly communicating the religious and cultural origins of the material to audiences; and (4) use of post-ritual *sampian* (ritual waste) rather than active ceremonial objects, thus maintaining respect for the sanctity of ongoing ritual practice.

Clifford's warning that transforming cultural artifacts risks detaching them from original meaning [12] remains pertinent. However, this risk is not inevitable; it becomes problematic primarily when transformation is undertaken without cultural knowledge, without community engagement, or with purely commercial intent. The present study argues that responsible recontextualization grounded in reflective practice-based research can serve as a legitimate space for cultural dialogue, simultaneously honoring tradition and enabling contemporary aesthetic exploration. The researcher's position as both cultural insider and artist-researcher is itself a condition of possibility for this ethical balance.

CONCLUSION

The recontextualization of *sampian* within contemporary fashion demonstrates that traditional objects are not static, but dynamic and open to transformations of meaning in response to changing social, cultural, and artistic contexts. *Sampian*, which originally existed as part of religious ritual practices, does not lose its sacred essence when transferred into the realm of fashion. Instead, it undergoes an expansion of meaning through new layers of

interpretation. In this context, *sampian* no longer functions solely as an offering, but also as a medium of artistic expression encompassing dimensions of cultural identity, material sustainability, and critique of consumption within the fashion industry.

Through the lens of relational aesthetics, *sampian*-based works reveal that aesthetic value lies not only in visual form, but in the relationships established between object, body, and audience. Meanwhile, from a semiotic perspective, *sampian* undergoes a process of re-signification, in which its ritual meaning is not erased, but transformed and reinterpreted within new contexts. This underscores the notion that meaning in art and culture is inherently contextual and continuously evolving, rather than fixed or closed.

Furthermore, this recontextualization opens a critical space for reflecting on the position of tradition within contemporary practice. *Sampian* is not merely an object that is “relocated” into fashion, but becomes a medium that connects past and present, local and global, as well as the sacred and the profane. In this regard, fashion functions not only as an aesthetic medium, but also as a discursive space that enables the negotiation of identity and cultural values.

However, this process is not without ethical considerations. The use of *sampian* as an object imbued with sacred value requires a sensitive, reflective, and responsible approach. Recontextualization undertaken without a deep understanding risks reducing cultural meaning into mere visual aesthetics. Therefore, it is essential to maintain a balance between creative exploration and respect for the traditional values embedded within *sampian*.

Ultimately, the recontextualization of *sampian* in contemporary fashion should not be understood as a process of erasing or obscuring meaning, but rather as a transformative process that enriches it. *Sampian* becomes a conceptual bridge that connects tradition and innovation, while simultaneously opening new possibilities for more reflective, contextual, and sustainable practices in both art and fashion.

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