imafuture
– exploring contemporary fashion communication

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Diplomarbeit – Schriftlicher Teil,
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1. INTRODUCTION

This project is an exploration of contemporary fashion branding that asks, how I, as a graphic designer, could expand the toolbox of communication beyond the introduction of new garments and add value through sharing ideas of emerging artists and creatives.

Trend researcher Li Edelkoort mentions in her presentation *"Anti-Fashion: A Manifesto for the Next Decade"* (Image 1) that we live in an age where people are used to consuming large amounts of media and being entertained through different channels at all times.[1] Therefore contemporary fashion branding should leave the idea of creating only one image or campaign for one season behind and concentrate on making serial content instead.

In my work, I aim to create an interdisciplinary collaborative platform for the fashion label imafuture. The label was founded by the emerging fashion designer Kreeta Aidla. Her goal is to question the taboos of womenswear and also the role of women in society at large by means of her label.

My approach is to expand fashion communication in order to build up a visual universe that is rooted in research, reflexivity, and discussion. The main platform of this approach is a website that gives users more than an online shopping experience. The digital platform consists of two parts — a "shop", that introduces the garments and a section with "stories" that will showcase the muses of the brand. The muses of the brand are emerging, independent female creatives who artistically express their opinions. They have been invited to create pieces of art in the field of performance, video, sound and literature inspired by and related to the clothes of imafuture. The artists have total freedom to reflect and express their positions, ideas and opinions in their individual style since the brand wants to showcase unique and authentic stories.

On the occassion of the initial release of the imafuture web platform, there will be two main topics being analyzed and elaborated on. Firstly, the slow fashion model in which clothes are only procuded on demand will be introduced. Secondly, a community will be generated presenting emerging female artists who challenge the present in order to create a better future.

My role in this project is curating the platform's "stories" section by inviting various artists to participate. As an art director, I designed the corporate identity and developed a branding that connects and unfolds the key values of the fashion label.

[1] *Anti Fashion Project*, https://www.anti-fashion-project.com/about/ (Retrieval Date: 06.05.2021)

Image 1: *"Anti-Fashion a Manifesto for the Next Decade"*, Screenshot from: https://www.anti-fashion-project.com/about (Retrieval Date: 06.05.2021)
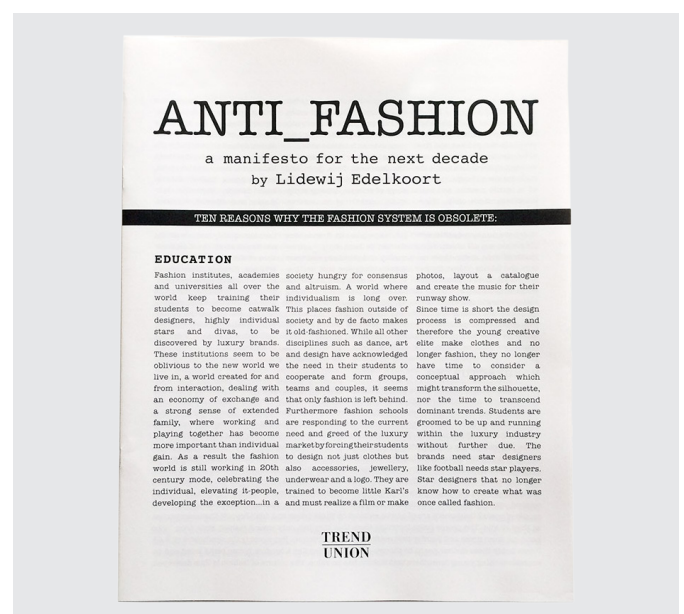
2. BACKGROUND, INSPIRATION, RESEARCH

2.1 FEMINIST PLATFORMS AND THE ROLE OF
    THE GRAPHIC DESIGNER TO SHARE IDEAS

Graphic design, especially in connection with independent publishing, has been historically an important tool for women to communicate and share feminist ideas. *"Chrysalis"* magazine was one of the first feminist magazines in the 1970s that grew out of self-help resource books such as *"The New Woman's Survival Catalog."* The magazine was produced by a collective process that grew out of the feminist practice of consciousness-raising. Another outstanding example of a feminist group, that used tools of graphic design, such as posters and infographics to communicate their ideas is Guerilla Girls, a feminist collective established in 1985.[2] Making indie and punk zines played an important role during the third wave of feminist movements for groups such as Riot Grrrl.

Nowadays, we find a large variety of independent feminist publications on the market – that promote women across the world to raise awareness on various topics such as – class and work, the body, sexuality, reproduction, equality at workspaces, disability, human rights, etc. Some of my references such as *"Girls Like Us"* magazine and *"Warehouse"* will be introduced in this chapter.

GIRLS LIKE US

One of the references for this project is *"Girls Like Us"* (Image 2) — an independent magazine from Belgium. They describe their agenda on their website:
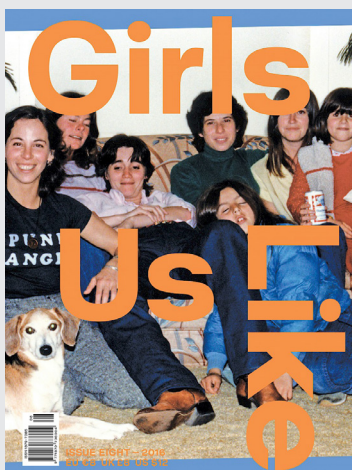
"GIRLS LIKE US is an independent magazine turning the spotlight on an international expanding community of women from all genders within arts, culture and activism. Through personal stories, essays and vanguard visuals GIRLS LIKE US unfolds feminist legacies in arts and writing. Mixing politics with pleasure, the magazine is mapping collaborative routes towards a non-patriarchy."[3]

They have published 13 print issues that cover topics such as objectification, generations and age, work and the body, etc. What I am missing from their magazine is the digital presence, since publishing the content online would make the magazine even more accessible.

[2] *"Women Art Revolution,"* Lynn Hershman Leeson, 2010

[3] *"Girs Like Us,"* https://www.girlslikeusmagazine.com/about/ (Retrieval Date: 06.05.2021)

Image 2: *"Girls Like Us"* Magazine, Screenshots from: https://www.girlslikeusmagazine.com/ (Retrieval Date: 06.05.2021)

ALL   EVENTS   FOCUS   PODCAST   (SHOP)   WAREHOUSE

SHOP
Rework Magazine
By Edwin van Gelder and Johann Tangyong (eds.)

SHOP
PORTAL 006 Reader
By Elisa van Joolen (ed.)

SHOP
COLLECTIVE WANDERING | Hanging Out with Our Everyday Ecology
By Lenn Cox (ed.)

SHOP
JOIN Collective Clothes | JOIN-top Knit Pattern
By Anouk Beckers

SHOP
[Sold Out] Fat Belly Boy Booklet
By Chet Bugter

SHOP
Warehouse Wear | Shoelaces
By Warehouse

SHOP
[Sold Out] A Magazine Reader 01
By Femke de Vries and Hanka van der Voet (eds.)

SHOP

Image 3: *"Warehouse"* Magazine, Screenshots from:
https://www.thisiswarehouse.com
(Retrieval Date: 06.05.2021)

WAREHOUSE – A PLACE FOR CLOTHES IN CONTEXT

"Warehouse" is an Amsterdam-based fashion platform (Image 3) that aims to create an open, engaging and inclusive environment that facilitates critical dialogue and the creation of a discourse that goes beyond treating fashion as a community.

This publication is discussing a wide range of topics that are connected with fashion while including creatives from various disciplines. Some of the texts are available in print and some downloadable pdfs on their website. Besides written format they are expanding to discussions in podcasts, organizing events, and expanding the objects of fashion as the tools of communication. The wide range of media makes it accessible and inclusive and breaks out of the classical format of the magazine.

CONCLUSION

The pieces of fashion only come alive, when they are put in the context of the person wearing them. The goal of this platform would be to create a community of independent female creatives, who are given the pieces by imafuture as a starting point of telling their own personal stories. The purpose of these artworks is to introduce personal points of view on topics such as sexuality and gender, relationships, reproduction, work and power position, globalization, sustainability, and the future of fashion.

imafuture will start as a digital platform because of its advantages of being international and accessible to reach out to a wide audience. Ideally, the platform could expand in the future as a host of offline events, podcasts, or self-publisher.

2.2 CONNECTION BETWEEN FEMINISM AND FASHION

In the middle of the last century, the second-wave feminist movements started to become active. It is also known as the women's liberation movement and the main issues they were fighting for were legal and social equality for women. Along with this movement also, the fashion industry experienced fundamental changes supporting the liberation of women. The more androgynous look was trending since the women were aiming for equality in the workspace. One of the most iconic pieces from that time is Yves Saint Laurent's "tuxedo/suit" for women. (Image 4) The innovative idea of combining womens- and menswear in order to arrive at more androgynous look received a negative response at that time.[4] Nevertheless, Saint Laurent opened a discussion of female empowerment by wearing the clothes that were originally worn by men. This shift opened a discussion of the relationship between gendered clothing and its influence and power.

The problem is that the discussion might have drifted in the wrong direction. As an example, we can discuss the question of the "power suit" that was especially popular among women's fashion in the '80s and '90s. The silhouette of this type of suit emphasizes on the features that are considered "manly" — for example using huge pads to make the shoulders wider, raising the question: If women want to have power in a patriarchal system, do we need to dress up like men?

[4] *Le Smoking*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_Smoking (Retrieval Date: 08.06.2021)

Image 4: *Le Smoking,* Helmut Newton, 1975
From: https://www.anothermag.com/art-photography/1869/helmut-newtons-le-smoking (Retrieval Date: 06.05.2021)

On the other hand, giving up features that are socially seen as feminine could be also seen as a sign of protest against patriarchy where there are certain rules and expectations set on a woman's appearance. For example, French musician and activist Brigitte Fontaine mentioned in the interview in the documentary *"Haut Les Filles"* [5] that for her the act of getting rid of long hair was seen as really vulgar and bold during the times when the female beauty ideals were Brigette-Bardot-types of bombshells. Behind the rebellious appearance, there was a political view of fighting back the right over one's body and decisions. Fontaine was one of the women who signed *"the Manifesto of the 343"*, publicly admitting to having an abortion at a time when it was illegal in France. (Image 5)

Even though these were the examples from the last century, it came up during the conversations with the first 4 participants of imafuture platform, that they are still struggling daily with the basic questions of equality. Therefore the discussion about social roles, power, sexuality, and gender are not solved yet and it is important to highlight these topics publicly to keep on campaigning for equality.

[5] *"Haut les filles"*, François Armanet, 2019

Image 5: *Brigitte Fountaine,*
Screenshot from: https://www.lefigaro.fr/musique/haut-les-filles-oh-les-filles-oh-les-filles-20190703
(Retrieval Date: 08.06.2021)

2.3 SOCIAL TOPICS COMMERCIALIZED BY THE FASHION INDUSTRY

FEMVERTISING AND FAKE FEMINISM

In the 2010s the feminist movements became more popular than ever due to the wide use of social media. The #metoo campaign by civil right activist Tarana Burke could be considered the most known and widely spread feminist action in the 21st century. It is even considered to be the beginning of fourth-wave feminism. It opened up a public discussion about women being sexually harassed and calling out men in power positions. As it was a trending topic for quite a long time, some fashion companies used the hype of feminism as a marketing tool. In the context of feminism, the term "purple washing" is used to describe a variety of political and marketing strategies aimed at promoting countries, people, companies, and other organizations through an appeal to gender equality. This marketing tactic has also been called, "Femvertising", which was most discussed in Gillette Razor's #MeToo commercial aimed towards toxic masculinity. [6]

GREENWASHING IN FASHION

In the last few years, greenwashing has been one of the biggest trends in fashion. Huge brands such as H&M, Asos and Zara just to name a few, are making attempts to show themselves as ethical and eco-conscious, while their production methods and marketing are still pushing people to consume as much as possible and produce as cheaply as possible to make higher profits. Meanwhile, young and independent brands are more conscious of climate issues and exploitation of the market.[7]

[6] *Purplewashing*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purplewashing (Retrieval Date: 06.05.2021)

[7] *The deception of greenwashing in fast fashion*, https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/environment/the-deception-of-greenwashing-in-fast-fashion-75557 (Retrieval Date: 08.06.2021)

2.4 CONCLUSION – WHAT CAN WE LEARN

Imafuture is a contemporary independent fashion brand, that is aware of the issues that are actually plaguing in the fashion industry. It's important to take social issues seriously and have a point of view as a brand. The ethical goal of imafuture as the brand is to promote slow fashion consumption and create a ground for discussion for social topics.

It is important to analyze how various "conscious" campaigns are built up to see that they are not honest and real. Greenwashing and purplewashing should be avoided at all costs at the imafuture platform since it stands against the core values of imafuture, which are transparency and authenticity. Instead, the garments should be shown as something valuable — they are pieces to keep and take care of for years.

3. DESIGN – CREATING A LOOK AND FEEL

3.1 NAMING

The name of the brand is imafuture and it could be read in several ways. It could be read as a female name, Ima Future, a fictional character that symbolizes the values of the brand. She is independent, rebellious, and self-aware. Her mission is to share her ideas about feminism and the daily challenges she faces as a woman. She is a chameleon, a character that can take on several roles throughout the day. Ima Future could be seen as a strong independent woman, an artist, a mother, a party girl, or all of the above. imafuture could also be read as "I'm a Future," which means that the woman who wears the label is forward-looking and aware. She is promoting progressive ideas today to have a better future tomorrow.

3.2 LOGO

The visual identity of imafuture is created with the same principle that the fashion designer Kreeta Aidla is creating with her garments. She is works with classical pieces of clothing by adding a twist in their character. Aidla questions taboos of womenswear the underpants marks (thong pants), the bra cuts that are visible behind the shirt (puffer vest), and twisting the classical use of materials (inverted power suit).(Image 6)

The method of making a logo (Image 7) for imafuture was inspired by Aidla's way of working — deconstructing the norms. The logo is based on a classical san-serif typeface Helvetica. Helvetica is a neo-grotesque typeface that was first released in 1957 and is strongly connected with rational Swiss style and modernistic values. The goal was to break apart rationality and masculinity by adding serifs to san-serif letters to give the feeling of roundness and feminine look to a logotype.

Aidla often uses humor as a tool to question the norms and clichés of womenswear; there is also a hint of a humoristic approach in the minimalistic logo. The serifs set only on the left side of the letters are a reference to the futuristic logo and type clichés in graphic design.

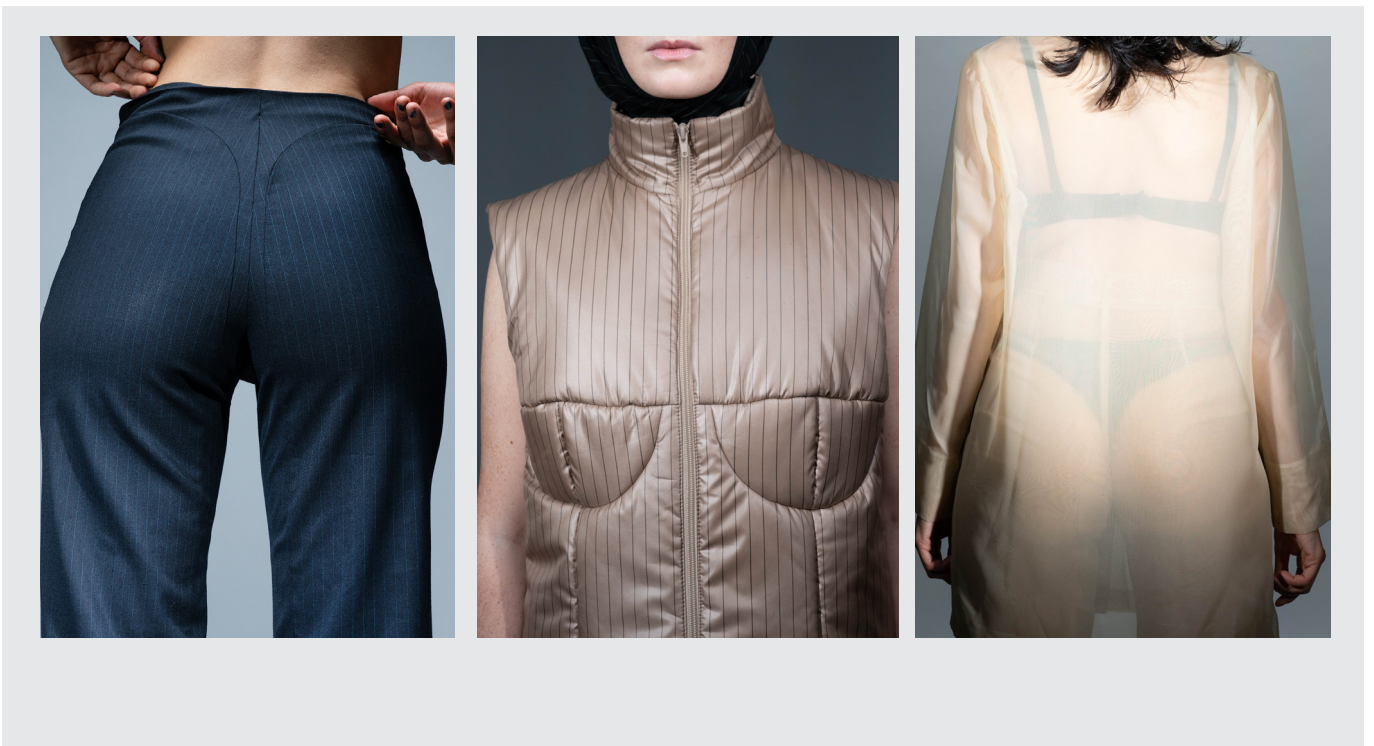Image 6: *thong pants, puffer vest and inverted power suit*, photos by Simeon Jaax, 2021

Image 7: imafuture logo

3.3. DESIGN ELEMENTS AND FONTS

The design elements and details that are used on the imafuture website and branding materials follow the same design concept as the logo. The arrows, edges of the image containers and text boxes are always rounded.

The round shape is the binding element of the design that creates separate fields for information. (Image 8) By setting the round elements with different sizes next to each other new unique combinations of shapes are created which conceptually support the individualistic approach of imafuture.

Two corporate fonts (Image 9) are used for imafuture — Morion Light and Miniature Display that are used in combination with other design elements. They are both made by independent emerging typographers and not overused in a commercial context. They are fitting for the brand since they bring out a playful and youthful attitude. Miniature is a display font that looks a bit goofy and experimental while Morion has a much more sophisticated and elegant touch. Used together in different hierarchies, they can create a refined as well as bold and outgoing look and feel.
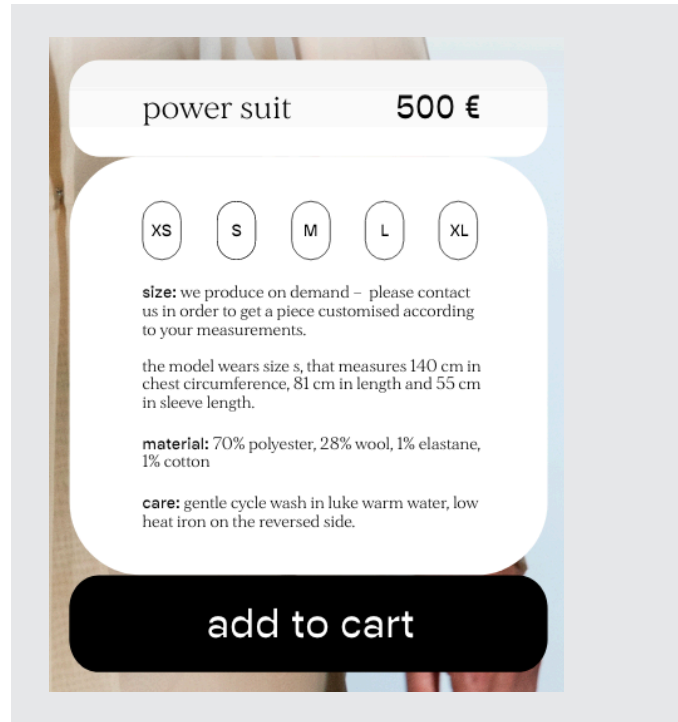
Image 8: Use of the design elements

Image 9: Morion Light (on the top) and Miniature Display (on the bottom)

thong pants

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
123456789
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

add to cart

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
123456789
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

3.4. PACKAGING

Since imafuture garments are handmade and promoting slow fashion, there was a question of how to solve the packaging that is on brand and would produce as little waste as possible.

The solution is to have an adhesive tape with imafuture logo on it so the actual package can be any humble and eco-friendly cardboard box.

3.5. LABELS

The function of the labels that are sown inside of the garments are usually really practical — they need to show detailed information about the garment, logo, and care instructions. Therefore they are often pieces that do not get much attention. With imafuture, it is necessary to draw attention to the instructions of how to take care of the pieces since it would prolong the lifespan of the clothes and therefore in line with the core values of the label — sustainability and slow fashion.

The idea is to print the slogan "dress today tomorrow" on the label so it would get more attention. (Image 10)

Image 10: Packaging (on the top), labels (on the bottom)

dress tomorrow today

material: 70% polyester, 28% wool, 1% elastane, 1% cotton

care: wash below 30 °C, do not bleach, do not tumble dry, iron at medium temperature

origin: handmade in estonia

3.6. VISUAL LANGUAGE IMAGERY

There are two different purposes of creating images for imafuture. One way is to create photoshoots that have a practical purpose — documentation of the garments for the webshop, branding material and social media, and the second one is storytelling. (Images 11 and 12)

My role is to be an art director for a shoot that has a practical purpose. For the first product shooting, I decided to invite my friends to model for imafuture. The idea was to have people who are not working as professional models to create a more authentic and realistic approach. The group included a non-binary model and a male model. The goal was to open up womenswear to anyone who feels like wearing it and not to stay inside of the strict system of communicating the clothes as being only for one specific gender.

The second way of making images for imafuture carries the purpose of storytelling. These kinds of images are not art directed by the brand guidelines — instead, they are free for interpretation. The "storytelling" images and videos are directed by the artists who are invited to participate in the imafuture website. The outcome is a variety of visual styles that bring the story and message by the artist in focus. The idea is to encourage people to tell their own stories and optionally complete or express their personal styles with imafuture products.

Image 11: Photos for the imafuture website,
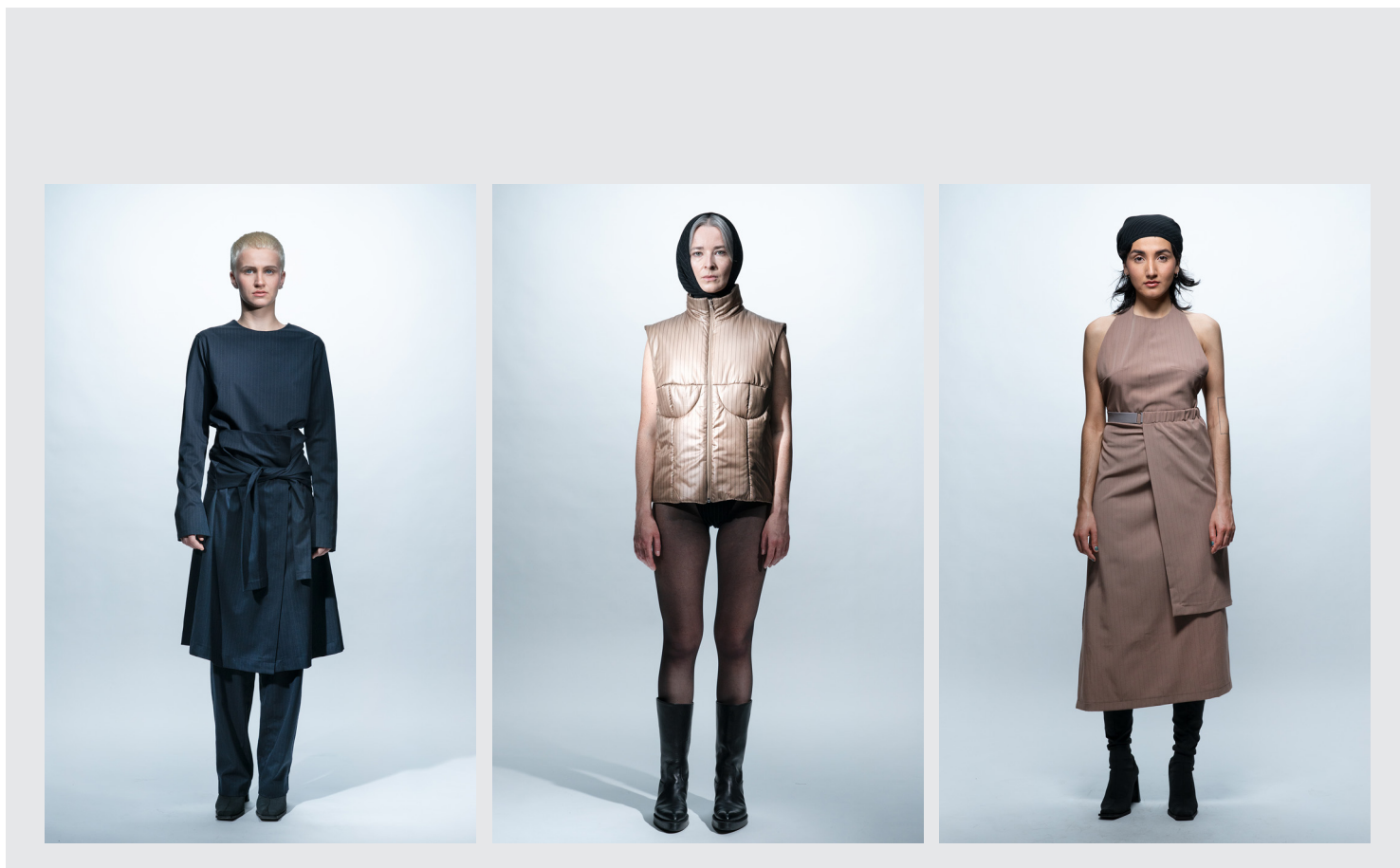Photos by: Simeon Jaax, 2021

Image 12: A photo for the imafuture social media,
Photos by: Simeon Jaax, 2021

4. DIGITAL PLATFORM – IMAFUTURE.EE

4.1 THE CONCEPT

The goal of imafuture website is to go beyond being a traditional webshop for a quick visit to purchase the products. Besides being a web shop, it will be an entertaining platform that showcases fashion through personal and unique stories created by independent female artists.

4.2 MAIN FUNCTIONS – SHOPPING AND ENTERTAINMENT

SHOPPING

The website's "shop" page showcases the garments as an overview and also with detailed views. It is possible to order the products via imafuture page, but there is a longer waiting time since the clothes are only produced on-demand. There are two reasons for that — firstly, the avoidance of over-producing and secondly — a customer can contact the brand if they need some slight customizations.

ENTERTAINMENT

Besides the shopping function, imafuture website will be also a platform for independent female artists. The first four collaborations that are published on the imafuture website include a writer, a DJ, and two interdisciplinary artists. The female artists that are invited for the collaboration with imafuture will be introduced to the selection of items and they can choose a product that they want to reflect on through their artwork. Some of the artists are not reflecting directly on pieces of imafuture clothing, but they are discussing a wider range of feminist topics.
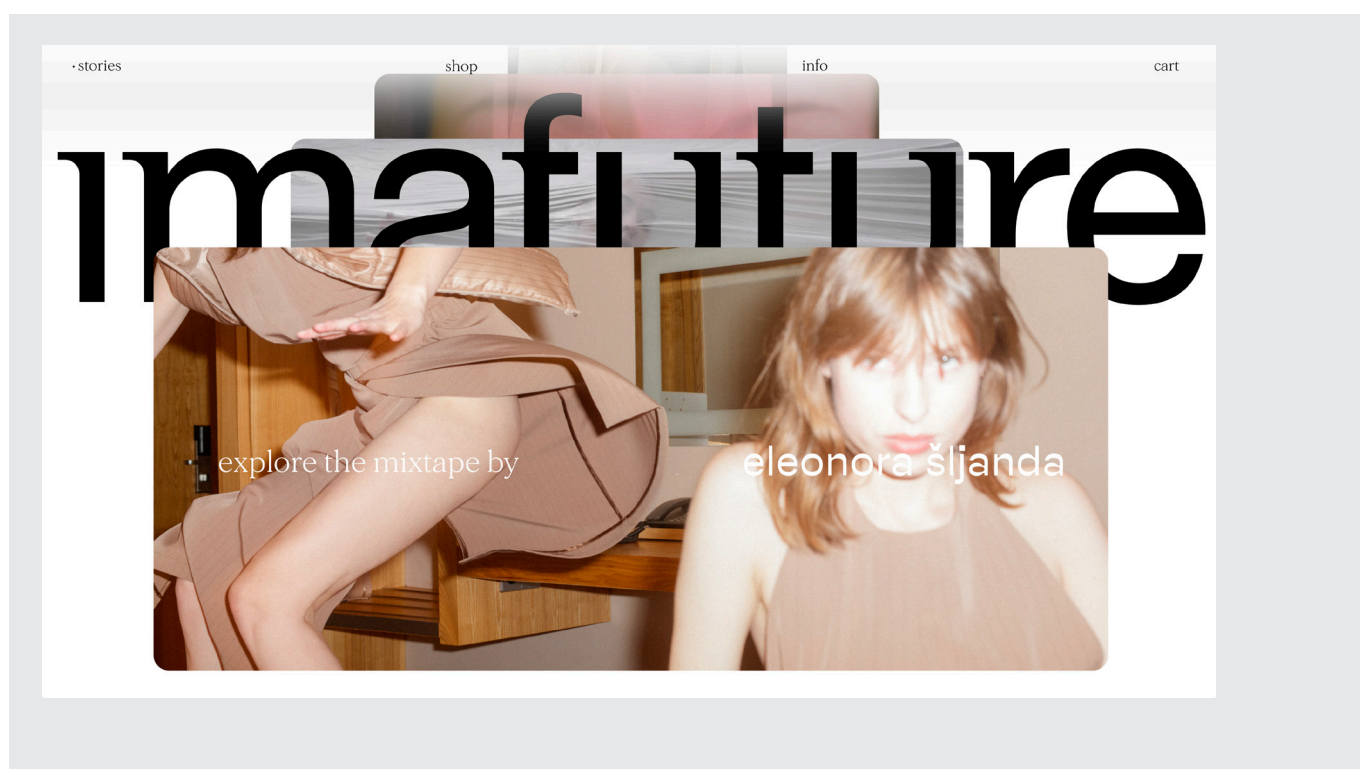
4.3 DESIGN AND USER JOURNEY

The design of imafuture website is built with the design elements that are described in the previous paragraph. Since the website is interactive, it allows for the adding an extra layer with movements and animations. One of the key elements is layering the elements on top of each other, which is inspired by the way imafuture clothes, that can be layered in different ways to create new meanings.

The website contains four main pages — stories (Image 13), shop (Image 14), info, and cart. The navigation is done through the menu bar on the top of the page. There are two approaches to the design of the header and background of the page. The first layout approach is for overview pages such as stories overview, shop overview, and info page. The logo is dominant in these pages to give a better feeling of the bold attitude of imafuture. The second design approach is for subpages that are showcasing detailed info either about the product, story, or purchases in the cart. In these subpages, the attention is on the subject, not on the dominant branding.

STORIES – OVERVIEW PAGE

The stories page is used as a starting page to highlight the individualistic storytelling through showcasing the content pieces that are made by various artists that are invited to participate as imafuture platform collaborators. Each story has a clickable thumbnail that is shows a preview image of the story with the name of the artist and short info about the piece. For example, the content piece by collaborator Jessica Comis has a short text "sail through the soundscape with Jessica Comis" on top of the preview image. The tone of writing is friendly and inviting to create an welcoming atmosphere for the visitors.

Image 13: Stories page

ımafuture

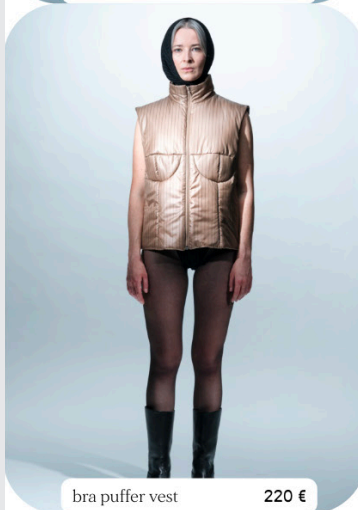|		
apron dress — 220 €	two-piece set — 300 €	three-piece set — 350 €
bra puffer vest — 220 €	thong pants — 250 €	power suit — 500 €
mid skirt — 100 €	bra vest — 150 €	corset — 170 €

Image 14: Shop page

STORIES – DETAIL PAGE

The second step of the user journey is clicking on one of these thumbnails to experience each story in detail. After clicking on a thumbnail, a user enters a subpage that focuses on one particular artist. On the top of the detail page is the main piece by the artist — either a video, photo gallery, mixtape player, or essay. After the content piece, there is a short description and statement of the artist. Under that is the scrollbar that invites a visitor to discover more stories by the other artists. (Image 15)

Since each artist is featuring imafuture pieces through their artistic approach, there is also a button called "get the look" so the visitor has easy access to the shop page, where they can purchase a specific piece or an outfit.

SHOP – OVERVIEW PAGE

The shop overview page features clickable thumbnails of garments that are available to purchase. When a user hovers over an image there is an automatic animation of an image that is hovering either a 360-degree moving gif of the outfit that allows a user to see the piece from each side or zoom-in on the detail of the garment.

The user has two ways of entering the shop overview page. One way is through the "get the look" button from the story detail view page or alternatively by directly clicking on a shop button on the top menu bar which is placed on the top of each page and subpage.

PRODUCT – DETAIL PAGE

The next step of the user journey is to enter a subpage that shows the details of the product. It offers detailed info such as a gallery with product photos, a detailed description of the product as well as info about price and sizes. (Image 16)

The user can click through the gallery to see the product from different angles. On the background of the page is a zoomed-in image of the product photo so the user has an opportunity to see the fabric upclose. A client is provided with the info under the sizing that the pieces could be customized to specific body types by contacting the imafuture team.

After deciding on purchasing the product, the user can choose the size and click on the "add to cart" button. The item is added to the "cart." Now the user can either go to the "cart" page for checkout or continue shopping. The product page provides the "discover more items" scroll bar with the thumbnails of more images of other garments.
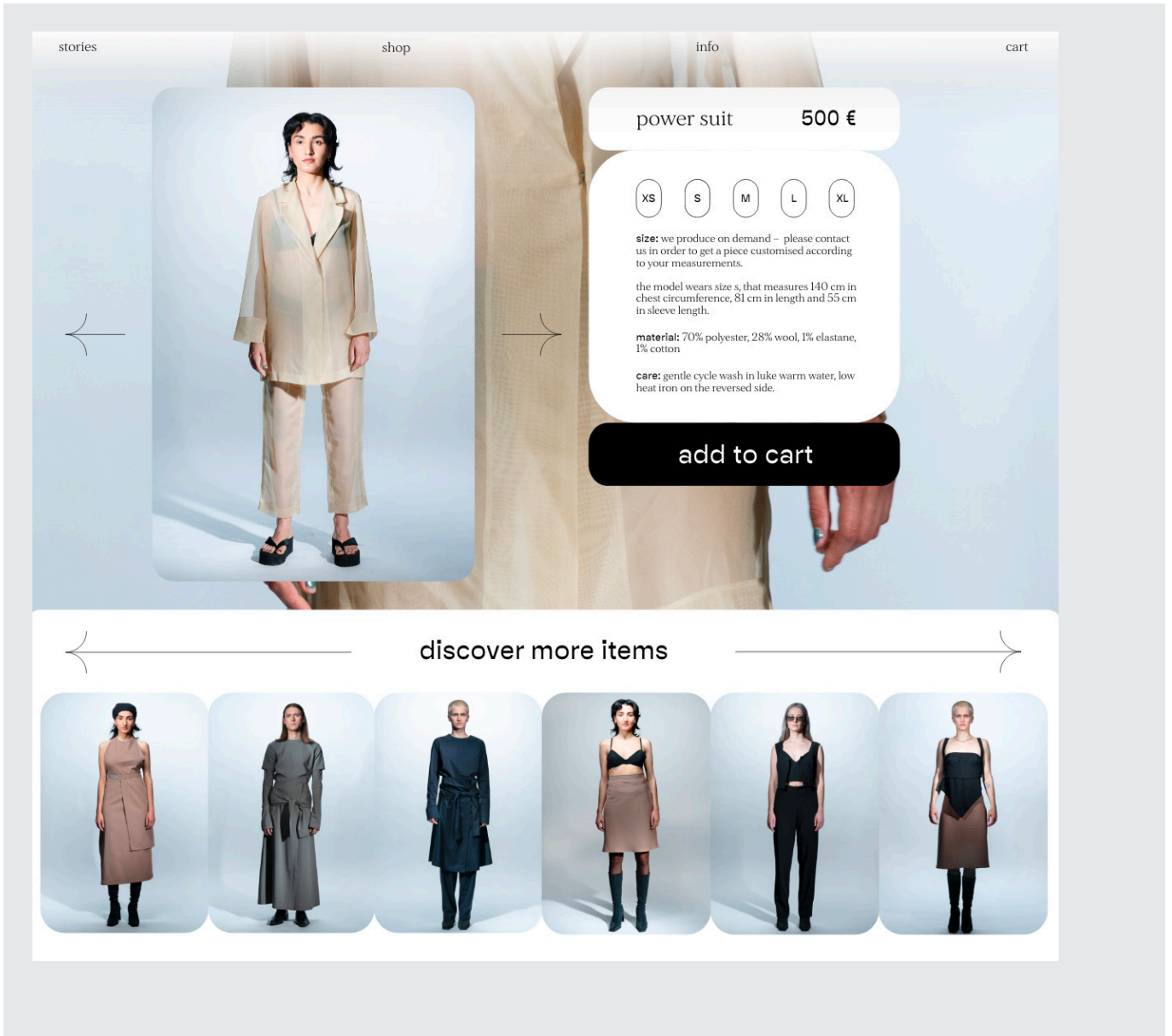
Image 15: Stories detail page
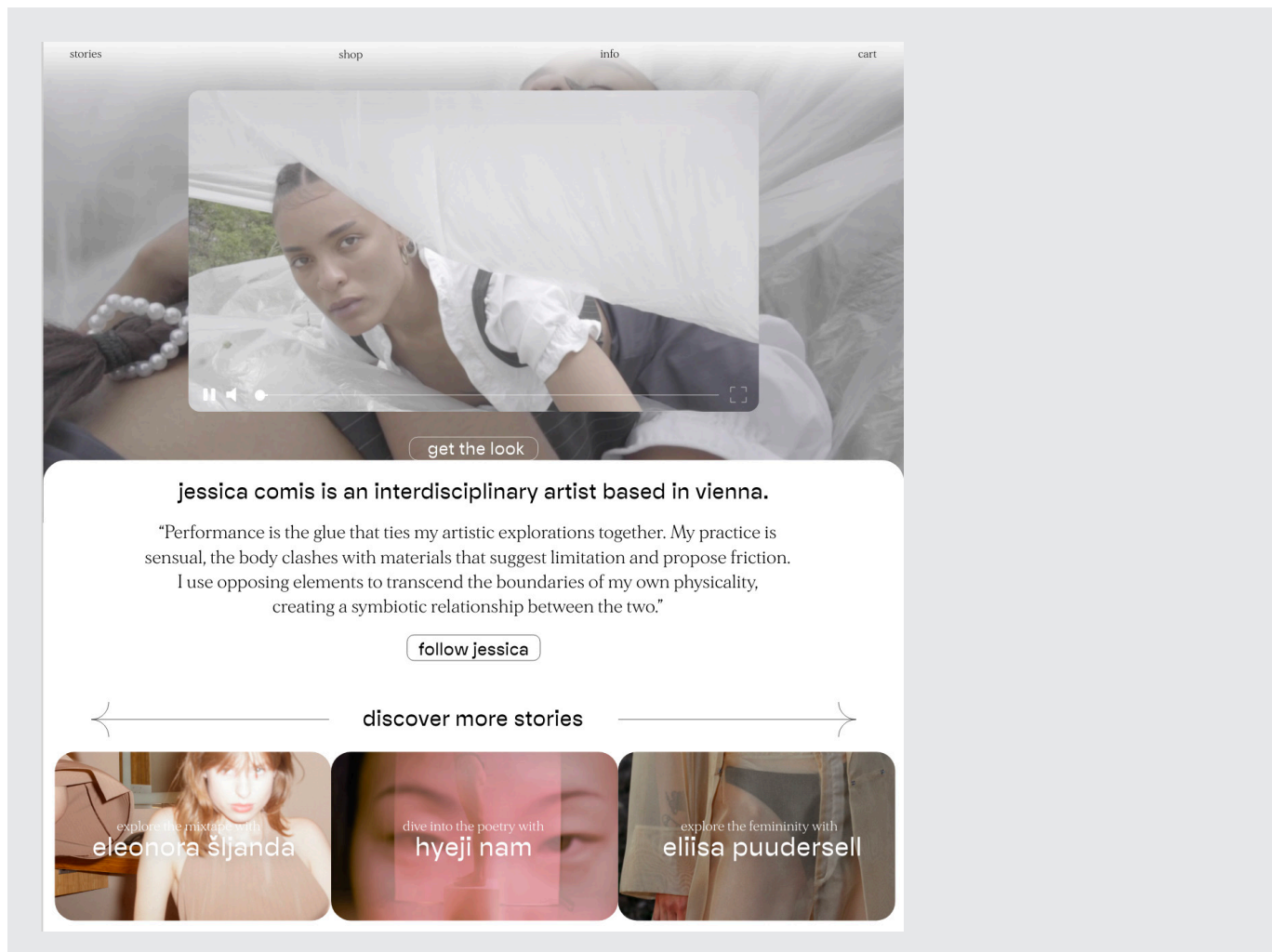
Image 16: Item detail page

INFO – OVERVIEW PAGE

The info button is visible on the menu bar throughout the user journey — on every page so visitors have a chance to access it easily on every step of their visit.

The info page provides a short brand statement and important buttons of information — "visit" with the info about the location of the imafuture atelier; "contact" with the function of pop-up mail window; "stalk" with the info about following imafuture on social media.

CART – DETAIL PAGE

The cart page is visible in the menu bar at all times so the visitor has quick access to check out and purchase the products as easily as possible. The cart page contains two subpages — the first one with the fields that are needed for the contact and delivery, and the second page with the final overview of the items and payment option. The final step of the online shopping journey is checkout.

FOOTER

The footer of the website contains the buttons of the sub-pages that contain the legal text about privacy policy, info about the delivery, imprint, and a button that directs to imafuture Instagram page.

4.4 STORIE'S PAGE

My role during this project has been curating, briefing, and inviting the emerging artists to collaborate on imafuture platform. The idea is to create a symbiosis between imafuture and its muses. Imafuture is a platform where emerging artists can showcase and promote their work while the artists use pieces of imafuture clothes as tools to tell their stories.

The visibility of the imafuture clothes is raised through the artists as well since they are sharing their artwork via their own personal social media channels. The artists are chosen because they and their audience are the potential target group of the imafuture clothes. The target group that imafuture aims for is mainly women who are sophisticated and aware of social issues. This target audience desires also a more sophisticated approach than the usual image creation with a big slogan.

The first four collaborators that are invited to participate in the project were given an open brief with the main focus on feministic approaches and topics. I chose four creatives with different backgrounds and mediums to have a variety of messages and standpoints.

4.5 FIRST EDITION OF STORIES

The first four participants of the platform are Jessica Comis, Hyeji Nam, Eliisa Puudersell, and Eleonora Šljanda. They are all dealing with feminist topics such as body, aging, power position, race, objectification, sex, and gender in different ways and were invited to put their viewpoint in the context of fashion storytelling.

JESSICA COMIS

Jessica is an interdisciplinary artist from Switzerland who created a video piece for imafuture platform where she deals with the question of power position and fantasies. She is embodies the character of a pirate in the video, which talks about the idea of freedom of expression. (Image 17)

HYEJI NAM

Hyeji is a performance artist and a dancer from Korea who created a visual poetry piece for imafuture that talks about the objectification of the female body. (Image 18) The video performance is inspired by the feminist artist Carolee Schneemann.

ELIISA PUUDERSELL

Eliisa is an independent writer from Estonia who wrote a fictional story about a young lady who is dealing with the questions of her own identity and position in society.

ELEONORA ŠLJANDA

Eleonora Šljanda is an Estonian graphic designer, model, and DJ, who created a mixtape that is combined with a photo shoot of her. Even though the general vibe of this page is positive, it can be also seen as a piece that questions body standards and the daily need of reaching the goals set by the beauty industry. (Image 19)

4.6 UPCOMING STORIES

By the time of the first launch, there will be stories from 4 people published on the website. The goal for the future is to work on inclusivity and invite people of different ages, positions, fields and backgrounds to get different points of view and keep the platform evolving and open.

Image 17: Still from the video piece by Jessica Comis for imafuture website
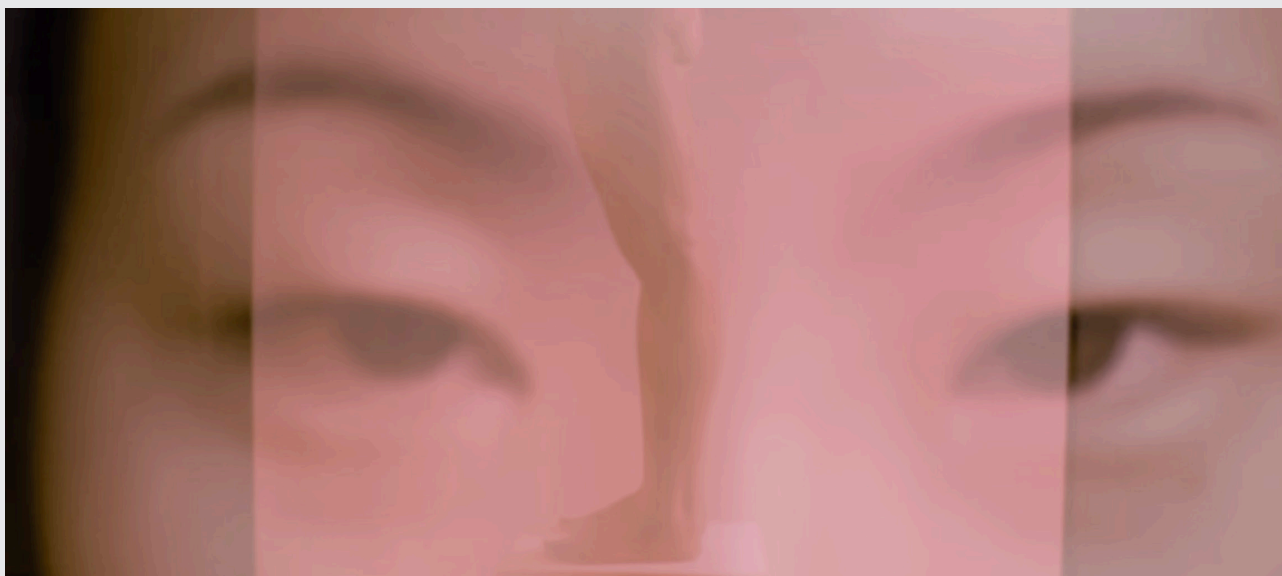
Image 18: Still from the video piece by Hyeji Nam for imafuture website

Image 19: Photo from the shooting of Eleonora for imafuture, photo by: Kertin Vasser, 2021

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 THE BENEFITS

The project experiments with the different ways and possibilities of fashion communication. The decision of using this kind of unique and individual storytelling method as fashion communication is beneficial for both sides: for emerging artists and young fashion brands to mutually promote each other. There is also an entertaining factor for the visitor of the page. The shopping experience is made more interesting by offering multi-media content pieces to discover.

5.2 OUTCOME

Li Edelkoort suggests in her *"Anti Fashion: A Manifesto for the Next Decade,"* a forward-thinking fashion brand should offer multi-media communication and offer an entertainment content to a consumer. [8]

The outcome of the project has reached its goal of building up a web platform that offers contemporary fashion communication. The next steps after the launch are to keep working towards becoming more inclusive as a brand and invite people from different fields and backgrounds to enrich the storytelling of the brand.

[8] *Anti Fashion: A Manifesto for the Next Decade,*
Li Edelkoort, 2017

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