

Contents

Rationale.....	3
Introduction.....	5
Critical Analysis 1 - Artists (Terry Frost & Ben Nicholson).....	7
Critical Analysis 2 - Ethan Hon.....	11
Critical Analysis 3 - Christopher Kane.....	15
Critical Analysis 4 - Edeline Lee	19
Links to my work.....	23
Conclusion.....	27
Bibliography.....	28



Inspirational Pinterest photo relating to Ben Nicholson



Inspirational Pinterest photo relating to abstract fashion

Rationale

Within this investigation I intend to explore how abstract influences such as art and conceptual themes can be found in fashion design.

‘Abstract art is art that does not attempt to represent an accurate depiction of a visual reality but instead use shapes, colours, forms and gestural marks to achieve its effect’¹. I have always found abstract art intriguing due to its ambiguity. To expand my knowledge on, and to enhance my passion for, abstract art I have decided to explore this theme for my Personal Investigation. I wish to look at abstract artists, conceptual fashion and find a connection between the two.

Through initial research, I came across some images on Pinterest and I immediately connected them to the work of the abstract artist **Ben Nicholson**. I will focus on his work and also of the artist **Terry Frost** who I associate in a similar style. I will then research fashion designers that incorporate abstract concepts into their work. I will analyse their work, drawing out significant points that I could interpret in my own way and later use for my own development.

I will collect my research information from the Tate website for artists, and the official websites for designers, as well as any other relevant websites or books. I will collect images from Pinterest or any relevant websites. I will also visit any locations or exhibitions and take photographs of aspects relevant to my theme.

¹ Tate. (n.d.) *Abstract Art* <https://www.tate.org.uk/art-terms/a/abstract-art> [Accessed 31.01.10]



Own photograph - Tate St Ives



Own photograph - Barbara Hepworth Museum and Sculpture Garden

Introduction

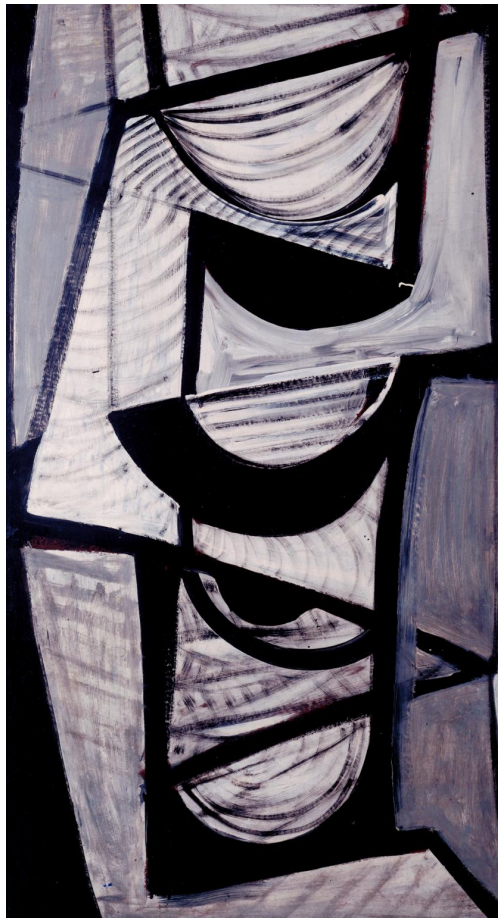
I will initially research **Terry Frost** and **Ben Nicholson**. They were both members of the 'St Ives School', which refers to the artists associated with the fishing town of St Ives in Cornwall, which became 'a centre for modern and abstract developments in British art from the 1940s to the 1960s'². I will begin by studying **Terry Frost's** *Black and White Movement*, 1952 from his boat series. The inclusion of geometric shapes immediately grabs my attention. I am also inspired by **Ben Nicholson's** *Feb 28-53 (vertical seconds)*, 1955. I love how the shapes create positive and negative space.

Fashion designers that incorporate abstract influences and interpretations include **Ethan Hon**, **Christopher Kane** and **Edeline Lee**. The initial inspiration that some of the designers used for some of their collections is from the work of abstract artists. **Kane's** *Spring/Summer 2016* collection was inspired by the sculptor **John Chamberlain** and his abstract sculptures. **Lee's** *Spring 2016* collection was inspired by the artist **Richard Diebenkorn's** *Ocean Park* series. Although **Hon's** inspiration is not abstract art, the inspiration that he uses ('the notion of identity and packaging design'³) encourages him to design fashion items that have an abstract aesthetic.

Through in-depth research and analysis, I will gain inspiration to develop my ideas and make the project personal to me through what I have found. In the Summer I visited St Ives and I took many photographs ranging from the beach and the boats on the harbour, to the Tate and the **Barbara Hepworth** Museum and Sculpture Garden. I will use the photographs to create personal responses, in the style of the artists and designers that I have researched.

² Tate. (n.d.) *St Ives School* <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/s/st-ives-school> [Accessed 24.09.18]

³ Author: unknown. (n.d.) *Ethan Hon - concept* <http://www.ethanhon.com/concept/> [Accessed 20.07.18]



Terry Frost
Black and White Movement, 1952



Terry Frost
Green, Black and White Movement, 1951

Critical Analysis 1

Terry Frost's *Black and White Movement* is an abstract piece, consisting of connected geometrical shapes, triangles and semi-circles. The lines in the work '*echo the shapes of the boats and their rocking motion, the curves of the ropes that secured them, the arcs of the swaying masts and the small waves coming into shore*'⁴.

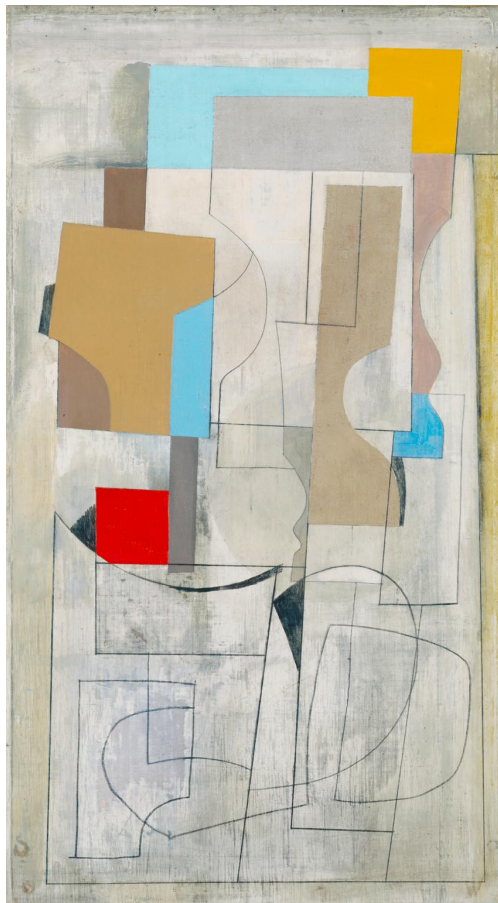
It is intriguing due to its abstract nature. Abstract asks you to see more and less at the same time. Seeing less is about seeing beyond the object you think you see. So for *Black and White Movement*, his purposeful composition allows the viewer to look deeper into the work. He explained that '*these paintings derived from his observation of boats in the harbour at St Ives, Cornwall: the rocking movement of the hulls, the swaying of the masts that defined arcs in the air, and the taut and slackened lines of the mooring-ropes*'⁵.

The word '*Movement*' in the title suggests that he wanted the viewer to see the shapes as if they were moving. The eye of the viewer naturally moves from side to side on an upwards diagonal, in a swaying motion, like boats do. Each line connects to another which encourages the viewer's eye to move around the piece. The mood is generally ambiguous, emphasised by the black and white colour scheme.

I love this piece of art, but significantly the zig-zag like composition and the muted colour scheme. I wish to take these elements and use them in my own work.

⁴ Tate. (n.d.) *Terry Frost, Black and White Movement 1952* <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/frost-black-and-white-movement-t06607> [Accessed 30.10.18]

⁵ Ibid.



Ben Nicholson
Feb 28-53 (vertical seconds), 1953



Ben Nicholson
Feb 55, 1955

Ben Nicholson's *Feb 28-53 (vertical seconds)* is a narrow compositional painting of geometrical shapes, lines, and blocks of colour. Each shape varies in shape and size. '**Nicholson** was interested in the ways in which paintings can represent space⁶', and the overlapping of shapes creates an illusion of space and depth effectively.

The focal points in the piece are the bright patches of colour, but it is the connecting lines which guide the eye of the viewer around the piece. Although it is abstract, I interpret that the artist was feeling content when painting it, supported by the absence of dark colours. The shapes that are the brightest are red, blue and yellow (primary colours), and the surrounding colours are more subtle and less saturated.

The media used to create *Feb 28-53 (vertical seconds)* was oil paint on canvas, allowing **Nicholson** to apply it smoothly and using a 'block' method. A ruler was possibly used to achieve the precision. This detail is another possible implication that the artist was feeling calm when creating the piece as opposed to any other feelings such as stressed or angry, as I believe the marks would be more expressive.

I love the crispness and precision of the edges; this is something that I will consider using as inspiration for my own work.

⁶ Tate. (n.d.) *Ben Nicholson OM 1934 (relief)* <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/nicholson-1934-relief-t02314> [Accessed 12.10.18]



Ethan Hon
***Chimera* collection**



Ethan Hon
***Chimera* collection**

Critical Analysis 2

Hon's ultimate passion is womenswear⁷. *Chimera* was the name of his first womenswear collection. The inspiration that **Hon** drew for this collection was from the conception of identity and packaging design. The main message that **Hon** intended to portray was '*how we package ourselves to fit into society through dress*'⁸. He is always "*fascinated by the idea of clothing and how it can change someone's status or cover their real identity*"⁹. His inspiration of packaging design is evident through the repeated use of black and white vertical stripes.

Chimera's colour scheme is very striking. Although it is limited, the colours work well together. The use of black and white creates contrast. The garments are oversized, but the lines within them are bold and angular. They are structured and maintain their clean shape, appearing square shaped. This could reflect **Hon's** packaging design inspiration; "*When I knew I wanted to apply packaging design into my collection, I immediately thought about origami and those collapsible packaging boxes that create interesting forms*"¹⁰.

There is symmetry within the collection. For example, the white 'sculpted and engineered overcoat'¹¹; the arms are the same width and length. However, asymmetry can be identified where **Hon** has incorporated different length black stripes for each side; some start higher and some fall lower.

The materials used differ slightly for each garment. One of the collection's key pieces, the 'pleated knit turtle neck', is made out of Merino wool and cashmere¹². For the garments that display white stripes, such as the 'wide leg pants'¹³, a 'white sheer polyester yarn' was used¹⁴. All the garments are associated with wool and knit, which can clearly be manipulated effectively. Pleating and knitting techniques are also evident, which create different, strong and unique looks.

⁷ Author: unknown. (n.d.) *Ethan Hon The House* <http://www.ethanhon.com/thehouse/> [Accessed 30.10.18]

⁸ Moran, J. (11.05.15) *Meet Rising Parsons Grad, Ethan Hon* <http://bulletmedia.com/article/meet-rising-parsons-grad-ethan-hon/> [Accessed 30.10.18]

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Author: unknown. (n.d.) *Ethan Hon Concept* <http://www.ethanhon.com/concept/> [Accessed 30.10.18]

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.



Ethan Hon
***Chimera* collection**



Ethan Hon
***Chimera* collection**

Chimera fundamentally represents a social issue. **Hon** is aware that people are conscious of how they look and what they wear. His design ideas almost contradict each other. The black and white stripes insinuate barcodes, which are automatically linked with packaging design, reiterating the idea that people “package themselves” to fit into society. However, the oversized garments, the unique materials and striking fabric manipulations act as incentives to encourage people to dress as extravagant as they want to, without being influenced by others.



Christopher Kane
Spring/Summer 2016 collection



Christopher Kane
Spring/Summer 2016 collection

Critical Analysis 3

I am analysing two of **Kane's** collections; *Spring/Summer 2016* and *Autumn/Winter 2009*.

Kane's *Spring/Summer 2016* collection was inspired by two different things. One being the sculptor, **John Chamberlain**. 'His work has been described as a kind of three-dimensional Abstract Expressionist painting'¹⁵. The other was the idea of 'crash and repair'¹⁶. **Kane's** Mother died in a car crash not long before the creation of this collection, so "*the car crash become the metaphor*"¹⁷. The idea of damage and building back up can be seen. Some of the garments are patched and pieced together, and there is fringing, lace, and wafting layers of fabric.

The colours are bright and striking, complementary to **Chamberlain's** sculptures. **Kane** has incorporated black and white, creating contrast. The garments have relatively simple structures. The fabrics drape well, and there is pattern within the garments but it is kept minimal in certain sections. For example, **Kane** used chaotic embroidery at the top of a garment and again half way down.

The key materials used were mesh, lace, knit and fringing. He creatively used mesh in layers, lessening the opacity of the material. On some of the garments, he used the idea of negative space, whereby he cut out sections of the garment, and placed a coloured piece of mesh behind. The way he used fringing was clever; it hangs down, but it falls from a small-scale weave.

I think **Kane** was focused on the personal meaning behind the collection, and ensuring it represented the idea of 'crash and repair'¹⁸ effectively; that 'beyond the purposefully fractured nature of the pieces' there is 'strength in something new', and it is that that will also 'always appeal to **Kane's** customer'¹⁹.

¹⁵ Author: unknown. (n.d.) *John Chamberlain* <https://www.artsy.net/artist/john-chamberlain> [Accessed 04.11.18]

¹⁶ Vogue; Bumpus, J. (21.09.15) *SPRING/SUMMER 2016 READY-TO-WEAR Christopher Kane* <https://www.vogue.co.uk/shows/spring-summer-2016-ready-to-wear/christopher-kane> [Accessed 04.11.18]

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.



Christopher Kane
***Fall 2009* collection**



Christopher Kane
***Fall 2009* collection**

For **Kane's** *Autumn/Winter 2009* collection, his inspiration was his sister; "*she's a bit of a twisted sister*"²⁰. The 'greys and blacks, flat lace-ups and tartan cashmere' was a new appearance for **Kane**. It has a darker colour palette compared to his other collections. The garments are predominantly dresses, but with varied shapes. There are some that are very straight, some A-line, and some more figure hugging. There is strong use of symmetry and precision. The patterns and components on the garment surfaces are the same size to the rest on the same garment, and the gaps between each element are equal.

The key materials used were cashmere, organza, mesh and velvet. The lustrous quality cashmere can be seen for the garments that incorporate tartan. **Kane** sliced the fabric, layered it and pleated it, emphasising the fact that he used techniques and fabric manipulations in creative ways. He included velvet for the vertical stripes, seen on many of the garments. I believe he also used velvet for the black necklines and hemlines.

²⁰ Vogue; Mower, S. (22.02.09) *FALL 2009 READY-TO-WEAR Christopher Kane* <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2009-ready-to-wear> [Accessed 04.11.18]



Edeline Lee
Spring 2016 collection



Edeline Lee
Spring 2016 collection

Critical Analysis 4

I am analysing two of **Lee's** collections; *Spring 2016* and *Fall 2016*.

Lee was inspired by the abstract artist **Richard Diebenkorn's** *Ocean Park* for her *Spring 2016* collection, and the way in which 'he worked with colour, proportion and composition'²¹. She noticed the link between his work and the work of the designers of the Memphis Group (an Italian design and architecture group founded in Milan in 1982); also part of her inspiration. This collection represents her traditional style: 'structured, feminine shapes, with clean modernist lines and precise attention to quality with thoughtful decorative details'²².

This collection is full of bold, geometric shapes, lines, and bright colours. It evidently has 'plenty of pop', but it also features some 'poetic tones and softer lines'²³, which relate more to **Diebenkorn's** *Ocean Park* series. The garments are basic, everyday garments of simple structures, including shift dresses, maxi dresses and pencil skirts. It is the colours, components and details on the surface of the garments that make them unique and abstract. There is symmetry and asymmetry. For instance, the garments that consist solely of the bold geometric shapes are asymmetric, but the garments that include the softer tones and patterns are symmetric.

The materials used are only described as 'fine'²⁴. It was essential for **Lee** to use high quality materials so she could print on top of them. To ensure the geometric shapes on the garments were not distorted, the fabric would have to be strong. The techniques used in this collection are minimalistic like the structure of the garments. One of which is the use of printing. It is fundamentally the 'geometries that do the talking'²⁵.

²¹ Neel, J. (23.09.15) *Edeline Lee RTW Spring 2016* <https://wwd.com/runway/spring-ready-to-wear-2016/london/edeline-lee/review/> [Accessed 04.11.18]

²² Twenty6 Magazine (n.d.) *Edeline Lee* <http://www.twenty6magazine.com/issue-e/lifestyle/edeline-lee> [Accessed 04.11.18]

²³ Vogue; Singer, M. (18.09.15) *SPRING 2016 READY-TO-WEAR Edeline Lee* <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2016-ready-to-wear/edeline-lee> [Accessed 04.11.18]

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.



Edeline Lee
Fall 2016 collection



Edeline Lee
Fall 2016 collection

Her *Fall 2016* collection is simplistic, consisting of solely blacks and whites, and occasionally reds. The 'rejection of information overload'²⁶ was the reason for her garments being overly minimalistic. The limited colour palette creates intense contrast and the shapes of the garments are predominantly oversized, accentuating simplicity. The collection includes oversized jackets, coats, dresses and jumpsuits. Some are long sleeved where the models hands can't be seen and some are armless. This was supposedly a 'breakthrough collection'²⁷. Previously she has had the tendency to almost overthink her ideas, but for this collection she 'gave her brain a break'²⁸. Although there was nothing physical or a philosophy that inspired her, she explained that '*she had been reckoning with her own desire to check out - to turn off her smartphone, tune out the news, retreat into nature*'. Consequently, her collection is simplistic and it allowed her to give the clothes a 'deep focus'²⁹.

The materials used encouraged her fabric manipulations to be successful. Virgin wool was the predominant material, complemented by other choices of materials such as 'the pliant wool crepe used for turtlenecks and leggings', and 'the silk seersucker used for the red maxi dress'³⁰. **Lee** incorporated a range of techniques, including contrast piping, creating outline effects. It works nicely as an accentuated aspect on the simple, oversized garments. There is also evidence of gathering, and she also includes punctuating pockets with bold outlines that complement the piping.

²⁶ Vogue; Singer, M. (19.02.16) *FALL 2016 READY-TO-WEAR Edeline Lee* <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2016-ready-to-wear/edeline-lee> [Accessed 04.11.18]

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.



**Own photograph - rocking boats on the side
of the St Ives harbour**



**Own photograph - rows of St Ives houses/
rooftops**

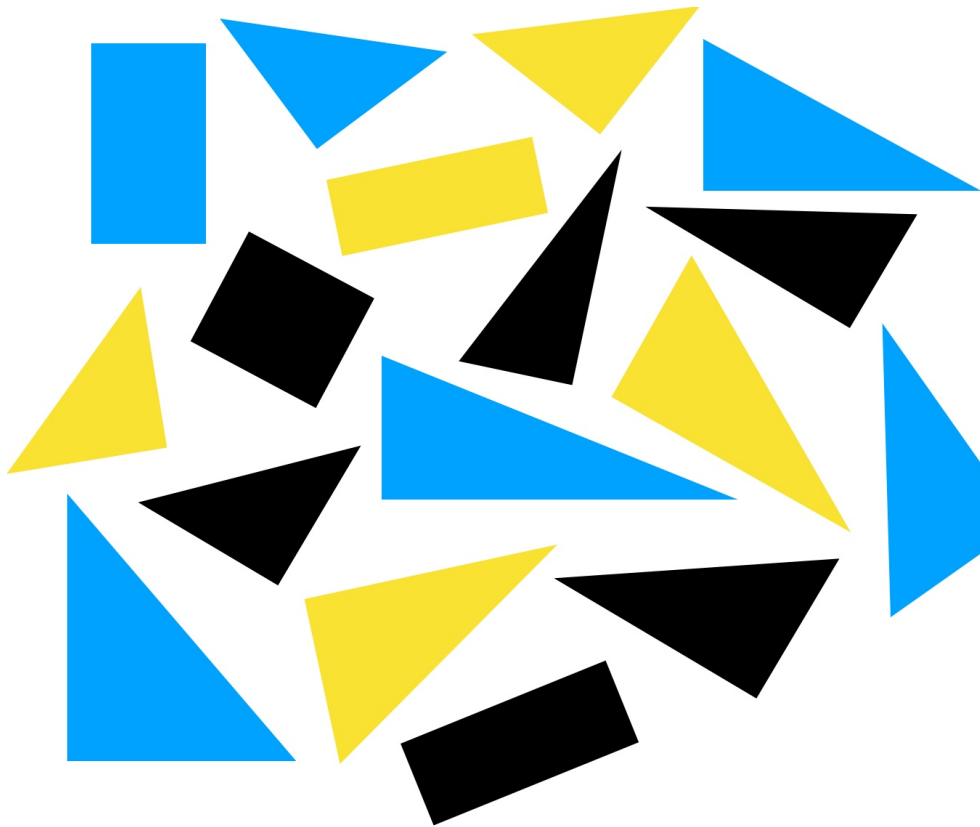
Links to my work

To ensure my work linked successfully to the artists and designers that I studied, I completed samples in two stages. The first stage of sampling was directly based on their work, and I displayed them adjacent to my research pages. I used the same colours, fabrics and techniques that they used, making them accurate representations. As my journey developed, I undertook my second stage of sampling. This involved using my primary photographs from St Ives, identifying links between them and my artist/designer samples, and creating new samples combining all my ideas together. My final design incorporated my favourite and most successful samples.

Throughout the investigation, I made links with the work of **Terry Frost**. Most significantly, it was the rocking motion within the compositions of his paintings that I was mostly fascinated by. I produced samples that replicated this composition, including reverse appliqué, and I resulted in using this compositional idea in my final design. For my final design, I used black and white piping to divide the main body of the dress into diagonal sections that I wished to do different techniques on. This represented the diagonal intersections that consist in **Frost's *Black and White Movement***. The other link was using St Ives as inspiration, which is what inspired both **Frost** and **Nicholson**. I was significantly drawn to the photographs that consisted of a blue, yellow, black and white colour palette, which were the colours I used in my final design. This was in particular the photograph of the rocking boats on the side of the harbour and the photograph of the rows of houses and their rooftops, both of which I used as predominant inspiration.

I made significant links with **Ethan Hon's *Chimera*** collection which predominantly consists of oversized garments with vertical stripes. For my initial responses, I undertook some mannequin work. **Hon's** colour palette is very simple, so I focused on using fabrics of a simplistic colour palette. My main focus was using vertical stripes representing his initial barcode inspiration, and I incorporated this into my final design; for the middle triangular section. I took the blue and yellow boat photograph, consisting of vertical stripes, and printed it repeatedly onto white bi-stretch to create a regular vertical pattern. I then sewed mesh ribbon onto the printed fabric in the same vertical direction, equally spaced apart. This vertical stripes and mesh idea also linked to **Christopher Kane's *Autumn/Winter 2009*** collection, as **Kane** incorporated mesh elements into his garments.

There were multiple aspects of **Edeline Lee's** work that I was influenced by. These included her use of bold geometric shapes, the style of the pockets and the contrast binding and piping. The geometric pattern that I incorporated in my final design was inspired by **Lee's** bright and bold geometric elements along side the house/roof top photograph I took in St Ives. When making my



**Own work - personal development from rooftop
photograph (digital version)**



Own work - pocket inspired by Edeline Lee

own responses, I firstly painted a simplistic, triangular composition of the rooftops, focusing on the same limited colour scheme (blue, yellow, black and white). From there, I created a similar composition but removed the dark outlines, spread the shapes out and only used triangles and rectangles. I experimented with painting, collage and digital to make this composition, and resulted in using the digital form, printed on white bi-stretch, in my final design.

I also incorporated **Lee's** contrast binding and piping into my final design. The various sections within my design consist of black and white fabrics; the bottom half of the dress and the arm cuffs are white, and the top half of the dress is black. When binding the exposed edges, I simply used the contrasting colour, and also when I used piping to connect the sections of the dress together. In both her *Spring 2016* and *Fall 2016* collections, **Lee** included pockets. It was the ridged edge pocket in the *Fall collection* that I liked, which I used in my final design. When sampling, I tended to use scuba as experimentation, which worked well because it really emphasised the rigidity of the edges. Due to my garment being considerably flat, I decided not to use scuba as it would have been too bulky, so I resorted to using white bi-stretch for the pocket. When experimenting with pocket samples, I not only learned the ways to construct them, but I also experimented with different techniques on the surface of the pocket. If I was to include a pocket in my final design, it was important that it connected with the rest of the garment, to avoid it being bland. As a result, I used appliqué with blue and yellow fabrics to tie the design together and I also painted on three black triangles on the pocket flap.

The link that I made with all three designers is that all their garments are over-sized. They are also simple in their structure and it is the elements that they incorporate on the surface of them that makes them successful, unique and related to abstract. My final design was an over-sized, long-sleeved shift dress, inspired by both artists and all three designers. The structure was simple and flat, but it was the techniques that I included in the design that related to my theme. I had no need to use constructive forms within my final design; a simple dress shape was enough which allowed me to think more about the flat techniques and colour palette that best related to the designers and my primary St Ives photographs.



Own work - my final garment

Conclusion

Concluding my investigation, I believe I responded to my original title and theme 'Abstract Influences Found in Fashion' effectively. Researching the work of **Terry Frost** influenced the composition of my final design, **Nicholson** inspired the simplicity and precision, and the three fashion designers and their abstract incorporations influenced my abstract incorporations. All the elements that I explored and subsequently included in my final design can be associated with abstract ideas or conceptual themes. Throughout the project and when designing my final design, it was essential that I referred to the abstract artists/designers that I had researched to ensure my investigation was concise and relevant. It was also very important that I referred to my own inspiration/my primary photographs, to ensure the investigation was personal. As a result, my investigation and my final garment were successes.

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