

Life Line

SHORT DESCRIPTION

This striking pair of trousers holds space for all the stories and journeys being told through these textiles. Each patch, piece and thread represents an abstract expression of personal experiences, emotions, and identities. Through appliqué, patchwork and stitching techniques, the composition symbolizes diversity, connection, and the coming together into one shared story. The garment features an oversized body and wide-leg structure, reclaimed belts and buckles form the garment fastenings from top to bottom down the leg on both sides, allowing for an inclusive and adaptable fit across different body types.

ARTISTIC INSPIRATION

The defining moment of inspiration occurred during a workshop where participants held the edges of a single sheet; through a collective, hand-over-hand process, a weave began to organically transpire. This act of communal engagement forms the foundation of the garment's narrative: a story of solidarity and shared strength. The flow of the garment mirrors the precarious journey of a migrant or refugee. The "long tails"—dyed with iron mordants to "sadden" the tones—represent the dark unknowns and fears of the initial voyage. As the garment moves upward, it transitions into a solid, tightly bound weave free of dye stains, symbolizing a fresh start and successful integration into a safe community. Both the weaving techniques and the dyes used are intrinsic to the traditional cultures of the participants and the heritage of Malta. Influenced by the diverse methods observed during the MUSE project—including paper weaving in Spain and basketry during MUSE week—we experimented with various structural angles. While diagonal weaves suggested a more feminine silhouette, I intentionally maintained a gender-neutral form. This ensures the focus remains on the deep narratives embedded within the materials rather than the figure itself.

SUSTAINABILITY

Reused/ Recycled / Sustainable

Components like metal hardware can be removed and reused, while all 100% cotton fabrics are fully compostable at the end of their lifecycle.

Eco-responsible Methods

- **Rust Prints:** 100% natural, cured with salt and vinegar.
- **Plant Prints:** Created using botanical matter and homemade dyes, mordanted with natural Potash Alum or woad compounds.
- **Indigo Trims:** Processed in rejuvenated dye vats with no added chemicals. (Note: The original vat was used to revive washed-out garments; while handled responsibly, its initial chemical composition may vary)



PARTICIPANTS



Tonya Lehtinen

Tonya Lehtinen holds a BA in Graphic Design and is the founder of Vogue Xchange, a social enterprise dedicated to circular fashion. Her work centres on the intrinsic value of textiles as a catalyst for social and environmental change. As an activist, Tonya exposes the inequities of the fast-fashion industry through community-led education. She manages the resale of pre-owned clothing and facilitates creative workshops specializing in upcycling, botanical dyeing, and other regenerative practices.



Users Participating in the project

migrant and refugee people

Life line
/ finished garment



Life Line

METHOD AND PROCESS

Natural rust dye techniques, hand stitching with stitches traditionally used for their strength to secure cotton bales, natural plant dyes, reuse of waste elements. As the project progressed, participants gained the confidence to move from traditional narratives toward abstract expression. The draping and maquette workshops were pivotal, helping them develop a critical eye and translate personal stories into tangible forms. While the challenges of purposeful engineering initially felt restrictive, the objectives established in Session 3 eventually took root. Most participants, previously unexposed to contemporary visual arts, successfully bridged the gap between their cultural heritage and modern artistic practice.

CULTURAL RELEVANCE

Iron mordanting—using iron-rich mud or water—is an ancient technique across the Mediterranean and Middle East used to achieve deep blacks, greys, and earth tones. This garment pays homage to Malta's once-flourishing cotton, weaving, and dyeing traditions. The use of raw cotton references Tan-Nankin (a rust-fast hue) and Ta' Gallipoli (yellow-tinged cotton), varieties native to the region known for their durability in sails and linens. The structure consists of wadded and woven sashes, reinterpreting the traditional Maltese peasant costume. Wrapped and tied around the body, the silhouette comes to life through movement, echoing the core of the island's history

Life Line
/ design process

