

scope

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Fashion Design Process
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FASHION DESIGN PROCESS

Britt Nelson-Misa

What fuels your design ideas?

My design ideas often begin as small fragments – lines from a poem, a brushstroke in a painting, or the way light filters through trees on an overcast day. I collect these moments through photographs, sketches, and script, allowing them to shape my creative process. Art, poetry, emotions, and nature are constant sources of inspiration, and are always woven throughout my process and final outcomes.

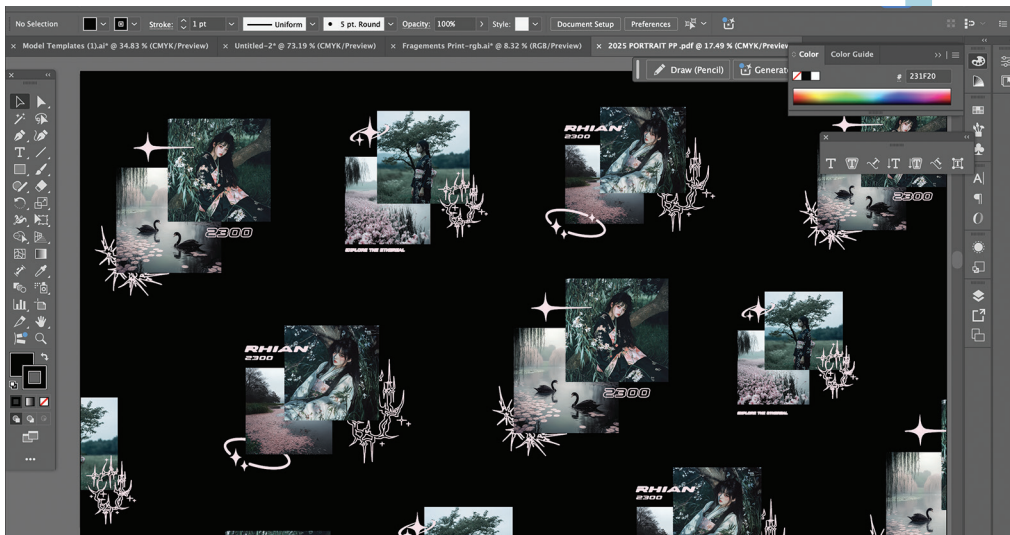
As I develop a collection, these inspirations guide my exploration of fabric, texture, and form. Sometimes, a particular image or feeling leads me to experiment with drape and movement, while other times, I start with a silhouette and refine its details to reflect the mood I want to convey. I often translate my ideas into fabric manipulation, layering techniques, or custom prints that embody the essence of my inspiration. Every step – from initial sketches to pattern drafting and fabric selection – is an intuitive process, and often non-linear, allowing my designs to evolve organically while staying true to the emotions and themes that sparked them.

Who are the practitioners who you feel have influenced your design processes?

During my time at Otago Polytechnic, I was fortunate to learn from some incredible fashion lecturers who became a source of inspiration for my design process. They emphasised the importance of experimentation and taught me to see beauty in what might initially seem like mistakes. This mindset had a profound impact on me, giving me the confidence to explore new concepts without fear of failure. I learned that what we often perceive as errors are actually valuable learning opportunities that can lead to unexpected and innovative outcomes.

As a result, my design process is now entirely rooted in experimentation. I rarely begin with a fixed idea of what I want to create. Instead, my designs evolve organically through hands-on exploration – testing fabrics, playing with shape and form, and experimenting with prints and embellishments until something resonates.

Beyond the technical aspects, I have always been inspired by individuals who express themselves authentically through fashion. Even when someone's aesthetic was completely different from my own, I found their confidence in self-expression deeply motivating. Being surrounded by such creative people during fashion school reinforced my own sense of authenticity. Now, I celebrate human difference in my work, valuing individuality as a core element of my design philosophy.





Exploring the ethereal collection.

How do you describe the rangahau | research that you do as part of your design process?

Much of my current research revolves around digital printing – exploring the preparation, dyeing, and fabric treatments that ensure a successful application. This involves understanding how different textiles interact with pigments, how to achieve lasting vibrancy, and what processes enhance both the durability and aesthetics of the final print. Additionally, I focus on the technical aspects of digital design, particularly file types and colour management, ensuring a smooth transition from screen to fabric. Learning the nuances between RGB and CMYK colour spaces is crucial to maintaining colour accuracy in my prints.

Beyond the technical side, my research also begins with visual exploration. I gather inspiration through imagery, colour palettes, textures, art, and graphics that resonate with the concept I'm developing. These elements are then curated into a mood board, which serves as a foundation for the collection, capturing the overall atmosphere and direction. This research phase helps me refine my vision, ensuring that every design choice – from silhouette to print – aligns with the story I want to tell.

What is most meaningful stage of designing for you and what happens at that moment?

The most meaningful stage of my design process is creating the first prototype.

I'm especially drawn to the hands-on, three-dimensional aspect of design – watching a flat concept evolve into a full-body form is always the most rewarding part of the process for me. It is here where I see the research, inspiration testing and toiling come together. At that moment I think I feel a sense of contentment and accomplishment.

What 2D / 3D methods or techniques do you use to explore ideas?

I often begin my design process with research and sketching, using collage as a way to bring my ideas to life. I layer photos, fabric swatches, embellishments, and textures to create a visual and tactile representation of the project's mood and direction. This helps me refine the overall aesthetic and feel of the design.

Functional modelling is also a crucial part of my process. I embrace toiling, key feature tests, and fabric experimentation to explore how a garment will take shape. Toiling plays a significant role – it provides a three-dimensional representation of my ideas, allowing me to see how the garment sits on the body, how it moves, and whether it functions as intended.

For me, research, sketching, and toiling work together as the foundation of my design process. Each stage informs the next, offering a holistic view of my concept's potential and revealing areas for refinement. This ensures that my final designs are not only visually compelling but also thoughtfully constructed and functional.

How do you select or adapt your environment to best suit your modes of designing?

I've always been particular about the aesthetic of the space I work in. For me, being surrounded by inspiration in my studio helps spark my creativity. My walls are filled with imagery, artwork, sculptures, figurines, fabric swatches, and plants. My studio isn't minimalistic or perfectly organised, but I thrive in the chaos; and amongst it all, I somehow always know where everything is. I also think natural light plays a huge role in my space. Poor lighting and a lack of sunlight often makes me tired, uninspired, and unproductive. A maximalist environment deeply impacts my creativity and well-being, which is why it's such an essential part of my design process.



What is the most enjoyable part of designing for you?

I think I am lucky as I genuinely enjoy every stage of the design process. I love watching each phase unfold, from the initial concept to the final piece. However, if I had to pick a favourite moment, it would be unboxing my fabric rolls. There's something incredibly rewarding about unrolling the fabric and seeing the print I've meticulously perfected on screen come to life. It's exciting to see the scale, colours, and details in their true form. The only part I'm not so fond of is waiting for the fabric to come out of the washing machine – I'm always too eager to start cutting into my freshly washed prints!



What role does working with others and collaboration have in your designing?

Collaboration plays a crucial role in my design process. I work closely with digital printers, models, photographers, artists, and many other suppliers to bring my ideas to life. I truly believe that one of the most important aspects of design is recognising and appreciating the people who help make your vision a reality. Each person I collaborate with brings their own expertise and creativity to the table, which enriches the final outcome and allows me to push the boundaries of

what I can achieve. Working with others not only enhances my work but also fosters a sense of community and shared purpose within the design process.

When you need to work with others how do you go about the approach and working?

I think it's important to approach collaboration with an open mind and a sense of respect for the people you're working with. Building trust and appreciating the contributions of everyone involved helps create a positive working dynamic. It not only makes the current project smoother but also sets the foundation for future collaborations.

As tangata whenua or tangata Tiriti, how do you practice in our Aotearoa New Zealand framework; how is this reflected in your work?

As a designer in Aotearoa New Zealand, I am conscious of the cultural context in which I work. I strive to approach my practice with respect for the land and its people. Whether this is through incorporating sustainable practices, acknowledging the importance of natural resources, or considering how my designs impact the wider community. Manaakitanga, Whakaiti, and Whanaungatanga are deeply embedded in our cultural framework, and values that I strive to uphold in my brands philosophy and processes.

