SULFUR

A relationship between colour and form
Abstract
Orange, turquoise, apricot, brown, dirt, soil, water, sky and sulfur were my first bricks while building this collection. I found them in the pictures I took in Yellowstone, in the summer of 2010. While being in Yellowstone I thought about the artist Georgia O’Keeffe, an artist I’ve long liked. The landscape of Yellowstone reminded me about her landscape paintings so I researched her life and work. She was a genuine feminist without saying it, she just lived like she was equal to other women and men. This led me to a book about forgotten goddesses where I found references to drappings that I’ve developed and interspersed with flat pattern cutting. One of my key objectives, in this project and other projects, has been to push the limits of menswear towards feminine elements. I believe that there’s a certain reason why a woman can wear a suit without anyone looking twice but it’s very striking if a man wears a dress. In this collection I’ve looked into various reasons for this and I aim to let men dress the same way as women do as well as the other way around.

Key words
- Fadings
- Orange
- Blue
- Apricot
- Yellow
- White
- Sulfur
- Soil
- Clay
- Water
- Draping
- Flowing
- Soft
- Hard
- Masculine
- Feminine
- Georgia O’Keeffe
- Distinct
- Surface
- Sharp
- Volume
- Fit
- Past
- Future
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Sulfur
My process started with a trip to the US, in the summer of 2010. Unbeknown to me this would become the basis of my final collection. I went to the national park Yellowstone in Wyoming and a strong odour of sulfur hit my nose as we approached the hot springs. There, in the middle of the forest country, was the most exotic spectacle I have ever seen. A core of hot turquoise water met an outline of orange, yellow and brown shades. It was the combination of turquoise and orange that caught my interest as well as the dirty apricot colour of the small springs that met the blue sky. This reminded me of the artist Georgia O’Keeffe.

"From the Faraway, Nearby" by Georgia O’Keeffe
Yellowstone - the colours that became prints

The photos I took in Yellowstone were my starting point when it was time to develop the current collection. Prints and dying naturally became my focus from the beginning and I decided to print/dye almost all my fabrics to get a flowing and alive feeling in the fabric. The pictures I had taken inspired my choice of colours but I had to find other references to find my forms. I had a large amount of photos but I had to select a few to focus the most important ones.

Key words Colour/Print

- Orange
- Yellow
- Turquoise
- White
- Apricot
- Brown
- Fadings
- Crystalised
  - Soil
- Uneven
- Alive
- Sulfur
- Skye
- Clay
- Well
Georgia O’Keeffe

Georgia was inspired by nature but she never painted exactly what she saw. She always made everything look more perfect than it actually was. She was an abstract painter who divided the paintings into different colour blocks but made every block in various shades, in a very subtle way. She ignored the rules and worked to reach what she regarded as perfection (Princeton University Press, Georgia O’Keeffe and New Mexico: A Sense of Place, 2004).

One of her later tutors told her that painting is simply filling space in a beautiful way. O’Keeffe once wrote “I decided to start all over new, to accept as true my own thinking.” She worked very spontaneously, without using the techniques you’re supposed to use such as sponging, brushing and lifting colours in various shades. She just painted directly on the paper, directed by her artistic spirit.

She experimented a lot, using quite cheap “student” paper, with water, colour on water and mixing the colours straight on the paper. She was very impulsive in her way of working. She was not a major watercolour artist but that was where she started. This was the beginning of her explorative methods and later on she moved on to oil paint (http://www.handprint.com/HP/WCL/artist25.html, 5/12 2010, Strid).

She is most famous for her paintings of landscapes, bones and large-scale flowers. O’Keeffe never painted people and her works are very clear without embellishments but with various shades to create a living portrait. O’Keeffe is mostly associated with precisionism. What defines this style is the precise and realistic way of interpreting something. She is also looked upon as a modernist, and she was very forward during her early career as an American female precise modernist.

She said, “You paint from your subject, not what you see …” Most painters made flowers quite small, romantic and delicate. O’Keeffe painted them the other way around, exploring what was inside, the subtle beauty and colours that you only saw if you looked very closely. Suddenly it became so much more than just a flower (http://www.georgia-okeeffe.com/, 5/12 2010, Strid).

“Pelvis" by Georgia O’Keeffe
Georgia O’Keeffe - The Film
To really understand who Georgia O’Keeffe was I watched a film about her life. I understood many things whilst watching it and I also understood what was important to me: putting masculine against feminine in the same collection.
Georgia was a genuine feminist, without just putting on a title since it was naturally for her. She feared lots of things but kept facing them as well as expressing her strong opinions and she was very outspoken. O’Keeffe met Alfred Stieglitz when he exhibited some of her drawings. They fell in love and married a few years later. It was a complicated relationship and a good example of a strong woman who met a man who first adored this woman but later couldn’t stand the fact that they were on the same level. He could not handle that she was equal to him; he wanted women who adored him so he could “make something out of them”. This is what intrigued me in regard to the meeting between the feminine and the masculine, it’s a really interesting stereotype situation (Michael Cristofer, Georgia O’Keeffe: Her Life Was a Work of Art, 2009).

Women who are like O’Keeffe, true to themselves with a strong will are something many men fear; just like Stieglitz did. Back in the old days, and still sometimes today, the feminine women have been the ones who dress in the traditional feminine way and who are more like a plaything to men than an equal being. I find the other women more feminine, the ones who are critical to the situation and change our habits, something which gives men and women the same rights. I find that O’Keeffe is a very good example of this. During the time she was discovered she was a revolutionary woman with her new free and modern way of life and did not even reflect over the fact that she could be worth less than a man.

- Does this common situation have something to do with how we regard clothing today?
- Is it one of the reasons why it feels normal to see a woman in a suit but not allowing a man to wear a skirt, dress or even clothes with feminine influences?

These are questions I ask myself often. They are questions and situations that make me want to change something and they interest me in real life and in the process of my design. This is the main reason why I never want to choose womenswear or menswear; the tug-of-war between them both is what interests me.
Men, women and goddesses

Through all times women have obeyed men. The woman was already from the beginning losing her will and power to decide things. In the Bible God blamed the woman for all the sins when she ate the forbidden apple. Men, and women, have put the woman aside and made her less worth than a man for as long as we can remember. We often say that things are equal today, but they’re not. Things are way better than they were 100 years ago but they are far from equal today. If we translate this into clothing women have worn “male elements” for ages but it’s still very striking if a man wears something feminine. Then he’s not a real man, he’s silly, and men who wear feminine clothes often start a debate where both men and women can be upset about this.

As I started this project I read a book, “Någonting annat har funnits” by Birgitta Onsell. This work spoke about how we’ve forgotten the important goddesses and only speak about the gods in various religions. The book focuses on the Greek mythology as well as Protestant and Catholic Christians. I found the book very interesting from the perspective I discuss earlier in the text about the O’Keffee film. I struggled quite a while in the beginning with various drappings, all because I didn’t have a reason and a background for my form. This book was as a reminder where to find my references so I borrowed “Efter tusen år av tystnad” by the same author where I found a start for my way of draping. (Birgitta Onsell, Efter Tusen År av Tystnad, 1994, Birgitta Onsell, Någonting Annat Har Funnits, 1999)

My aim was to combine those drappings with sharp construction, to get a balance between drapings and tight fitted pieces. I found O’Keffee’s austere style both beautiful and interesting.

Georgia O’Keffee and her austere style.

Goddesses from “Efter tusen år av tystnad”.

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Idea

1. Sulfur is about determined drapings interspersed with strong colours, neither one taking over.

2. There are no limits, men and women can dress the same.
Pre-process

First quick sketches.

Second sketches.

First drappings, made of rectangular pieces of fabrics/paper
After struggling with sketches and draped toiles that looked like meaningless blobs I decided to bring some colour into the project, since that is an important ingredient. I dyed 2.2 m of viscose fabric in a kettle in the same colours that I saw in my pictures. I draped a skirt quite quickly where I let the colours decide how to fold the fabric to make drapings. I liked the result immediately and decided to use dyed fabric while doing my first silhouettes. This was the draping that I wanted to develop more and build the collection upon.

This is the garment where I found my way of draping and the skirt is also kept in the final collection, there on a man.
A few days after I made my key skirt we went to London with our class. I weared the skirt the whole day, to see what happened, how it felt and get an understanding for how my collection would feel on the body for the wearer. Here are pictures taken at the Barbican.

Pictures from a short film I made where I tried the skirt on a dancer in different ways. This film has been important since it was the first time I saw my colours and forms in movement. I’ve tried to keep the poetic and distinct feeling throughout the collection. I’ve also kept enough quantity of fabric to make unopposed movements in the garments with the bigger drapings.
Dying and draping

When we in February presented three outfits I had worked with the simple principle not to cut in my fabrics. I draped the fabrics in the same way I did with the skirt, to keep the rectangular piece of fabric that was dyed. To develop my dye techniques I made several tests where I used brush, dip dyed in a kettle and space dyed. It was hard to get the brilliant strong colours I aimed to reach but when I painted the silk, let it dry, heat fixed it and washed it I got a satisfying result. To get a living and haphazard feeling I also wet the fabric quite a lot to let the colour wander away just like nature do.

During my presentation we discussed that the drapings need to be developed further. They need to be thought out and neater. I am satisfied with how I have dyed the fabrics but I need to lighten them by adding white areas. I’ll also bring an apricot colour combined with turquoise in the collection. To make a frame I’ll use dark brown as a contrast and to bring something more from nature pictures into my wholeness. Until now I’ve almost forbidden myself to pattern cut but now I intend to add that tool to make it all sharper. I’ll also see if I can let the colour/print control the construction.

- Use a more controlled pattern cutting.
- Make the drapings smarter, continue to develop them.
- Bring in apricot/light orange in combination with turquoise and dark brown.

First toiles of dyed silk that is draped of rectangular pieces.
Process

To interact the drapings with construction I draped on basic garments like trousers and blazer (picture to the left). Step two was to take the draping down, copy it on paper and control that the sewing lines were matching (picture in the middle). After having made the pattern I made a toile (picture to the right) and then I developed the fit and volume from that toile.

First step of drapings. From the left; women’s trousers, men’s trousers and last two women’s skirts.
I made several tests how to best dye my fabrics and the picture to the upper left worked best. I painted my fabrics, with a solution with three times as much pigment, and then I let them dry. After drying I heat fixed it before I washed it. This was the way to get the most clear and shiny fadings. To get the feeling of soil and something crystalized I dyed fabrics in a kettle and had to be quick to get the uneven surface I aimed for.

Painted silk drying to the right.

Kettle dying below.
First lineup back and front, only the third one is menswear.

Second lineup, above men’s wear and below women’s wear.

Fourth lineup, toile seminar 5th of April.
Fifth lineup.
Sixth and final lineup.
T-shirt: Brown t-shirt made of satin silk, matte side out. The t-shirt has a suede finish at sleeves and neckhole and a folded tape of silk at the lower hem to give it some heaviness.

Skirt: Rectangular piece of fabric that I’ve painted to fade and then draped as a skirt, satin silk. The skirt has a concealed zip at the side and a typical trouser’s waistband.

Trouser: The trouser is made of thin, transparent cotton that is painted at the lower legs to fade from dark blue to white. The trouser have the most common details like pockets in sideseam, pockets at the back, fly and waistband.
Tank top: Draped asymmetric tank top made of dark brown suede. Finish is the same as the t-shirt’s apart from the lower hem that is open at this one.

Trouser: Digital printed trouser with folds over the sides. Pockets in sideseam and at the back, fly and waistband. Made of heavy silk faille, prepared in digital printed with reactive colour.
Knit: Sparse knitted fabric that is painted to fade from orange to blue. Long sleeves, 100% mercerized cotton.

Trouser: Dark brown trousers in wool that is dyed in a kettle to get a bit uneven. Big folds from the sides and back to make it bit skirtlike. Pockets in side seam and on the back, fly and waistband.
Outfit 4

Knit: Sparse knitted fabric that is painted to fade from orange to blue. Long sleeves, 100% mercerized cotton.

Trouser: Dark brown suede trouser with small folds/drapings at the front. Pockets in side seam and one pocket at the back. Fly and waistband.
Outfit 5

Jacket: Orange digital printed silk jacket in heavy silk faille. The jacket is symmetric at the front but asymmetric at the back. Draping at the sleeve and concealed zip. Facings and lining that is totally closed.

Dress (not made yet): Long simple dress in satin silk that is handpainted to fade from dark blue to orange.
Dress: Knee length dress, same model as the tanktop, in habotai silk that fade from dark bluet to orange.

Trouser: Mercerized cotton trousers with pockets in sideseam and at the back, fly and waistband. The trouser is hand painted to fade from orange to white.
Jacket: Blue kettle dyed jacket in Shantung silk. The jacket is symmetric at the back and asymmetric at the front. Draping at the sleeve and concealed zip. The jacket is closed with one magnetic button and one popper.

Skirt: One piece habotai silk skirt. The skirt is draped and folded, has a facing, lining and concealed zip at the right side. The skirt is hand painted.

Trouser: Straight organza silk trouser with concealed zip at the right side. Dyed to fade from dark orange to white.
Coat: Long, light draped coat made of kettle dyed Shantung silk. Draping at the sleeve and concealed zip. The jacket is closed with one magnetic button and one popper.

Trouser: Turquoise satin silk trouser with small folds/drapings at the front. Pockets in side seam and one pocket at the back. Fly and waistband.
Jacket: Beige suede jacket, closed with magnetic buttons. Draping at the sleeve and concealed zip. The jacket has the same finish with suede tapes that the tank top.

Woven Shirt: Kettle dyed thin cotton shirt. The shirt have uneven stains of colour to look like the crystalised ground. Raw, double bias binding makes the finish at all ends.

Trouser: Kettle dyed shantung silk trouser with skirtlike draping at the back. One pocket at the back and in sideseams, fly and waistband.
Outfit 10
Trouser: Digital printed trouser with folds over the sides. Pockets in sideseam and at the back, fly. Made of heavy silk faille, prepared in digital printed with reactive colour.

Dress: Long satin silk dress with draping at the upper back and lower front. Hand painted to fade from blue to apricot/beige.
Evaluation
It's a bit too early in the process to evaluate this collection since it's not ready yet. I've been struggling quite a lot with this collection and only the last month it has been clear to me what I actually do. I had a clear idea from the beginning, I knew I wanted to work with colour and which colours. I imagined prints, fabrics and the feeling of the collection. I focused on not use controlled pattern cutting I started, to drape, without any reference to either form or what I aimed to reach with my drapings. It took me two months to find my reference and by then I also painted silk fabric to drape with, instead of the stiff and lifeless calico. My first try with dyed fabric became a skirt that still is in the collection as well as the key draping. I continued to drape with different painted silk fabrics, but again it turned out as blobs. My conclusion was that it didn’t work with fabric wider than 90 cm, everything wider lost the distinct expression. After the Mareunrols seminar I started to combine draping with construction and it was by then I came to a turning point. Suddenly it became clear to me how to combine my beloved controled pattern cutting with drapings. I made the first lineup very quickly but every garment needed lots of changes to get a good fit and to give the drapings the right exposure. It has been a bit confusing to combine strong colours with these drapings since it’s two new techniques for me, both very time consuming. Almost all my fabrics are hand dyed or hand painted and to get a harmony in my wholeness has been quite hard. It has taken many tries to reach the right colours, to use the right amounts of pigment to get the brilliance I want. To combine this with all changes and toiles I had to do on the garments have made me wonder if I try to combine to many elements in the same collection. Although I will like the result in the end, it has been challenging and fun but not a “safe” way to make a collection. I think I need to develope these techniques further in future collections to really handle them, this is just a start.
References

Books
- Birgitta Onsell, *Efter Tusen År av Tystnad*, 1994
- Birgitta Onsell, *Någonting Annat Har Funnits*, 1999 Bjärnum
- Princeton University Press, *Georgia O´Keeffe and New Mexico: A Sense of Place*, 2004

Film

Art
- Georgia O´Keeffe, *Pelvis*, 1943
- Georgia O´Keeffe, *From the Faraway Nearby*, 1937
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