

Becoming.

Forman & Mulvihill

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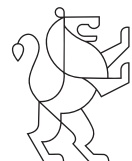
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Foreword

Bottom line, up front... I'm Edward's mother.

I've been an observer of Becoming as it has formed and evolved by Edward and Joel, and indeed have observed Edward's artistic path from his childhood. I'm humbled to have been invited to write the Foreword of their book.

Edward and Joel have jointly germinated and realised a collection of photographs which exude a love of material properties, a love of sculptured forms, a love of boundary pushing and ultimately, a love of discovery and play.

The decision to produce this collection is centred in play. Both men are professionals in their respective fields, having met through their advertising agent: Edward is a photographer and Joel, a hairdresser and stylist. Both are respected in their fields and enjoy reputations as skilled and disciplined creatives.

It is this disciplined creativeness that intrigues them as photographer and stylist. The disciplined-ness is present when realising a brief. But so too, is the creative-ness. But what if they didn't have the advertising brief as the constraint on their creative work? It was this question that led to this collaboration.

This book sits between the attributes of disciplined and creative. It is playing with the tension between realising a client's brief and freely creating without intent. This unintentionality is expressed using their skills, knowledge and technology within the world of fashion. Unintentionality is unleashed, running free as fun and play. They are simply creating, exploring and playing with the architecture of their respective professions.

As they are creating, they are playing with meanings of identity design and the functionality of the technology of fashion. Instead of playing the game, they are playing the meaning. For example, what are the meanings of the model, of the studio, of hair, face and clothing? Is hair a kind of clothing? Are clothes made from any kind of material? Is materiality real or digital? Is the model a sculpture? Does sharp focus matter? And so on.

Their explorations and discoveries have brought them joy and a sense of agency, separated from the commercial pressure of fashion photography and advertising. They have loved their collaboration and energise each other as they push boundaries and see where their creativeness takes them, with only their creative impulses collectively making meanings.

This journey of meaning making has been underpinned by their enquiry into the nature of making and an interest in how making unfolds with both the creator and the materials engaged in a dialogue where meaning exists. Yet meaning is ambiguous and waiting expectantly for the viewer to make sense of it and finding meaning for themselves.

This is the becoming that Edward and Joel invite you to engage in, the becoming of an artifact. It offers the viewer a moment to play with meaning.

I want to congratulate them both for this body of work. It both challenges and delights.

B E C O M I N G

During the two years or so it took to produce these images with Joel Forman, I have been simultaneously engaged in a Masters of Fine Arts. During this time, my life has been occupied with making sculptures, thinking, researching and writing while earning a wage. The escape from these pressures and commitments has largely been wine-soaked conversations with Joel regarding fashion, life and photos. Choosing to act on one of those conversations, we chose to represent our thoughts through images. Amongst other things, what resulted are the images of Ava with hair so long it could be interpreted as both a hairstyle and a fashion garment. As the conversations rolled on, so did the commitment to making more photos and ultimately, making this book.

The following essay comprises elements of my research that relate to the process of identity design. It has always felt to me that fashion and style are important. However the high volume of product consumption and advertising-overload make this special process of identity design feel ubiquitous. The following essay aims to inform the reader that the everyday process of style is more than just the consumption of products. The relationship between the mind, the materials we engage with and the meaning that is produced from that engagement is profoundly interesting. Moreover even our unconscious, playful or accidental actions tell the world what we want it to know about us.

My mind, like your mind, contains images. These images are vessels of emotions and ideas that are otherwise inexpressible or too abstract. The expression of these mental images is a means of communication between humans. Mental images can express unconscious levels of our experience and more conscious understandings of our world. The life experiences, conscious thoughts and unconscious actions expressed by Joel and myself have resulted in the body of images that make up Becoming.

Making in all its forms is a kind of exploration; it is an emotional process that expresses the experience of the maker. Too often, we require outcomes from our making. Becoming, however, emphasises process over outcome. Becoming aims to liberate making from an anxious drive for production. It is a process of searching for creative freedom through a state of play, as play is emotional and an essential part of creation.

Living in a product-focused society, we become accustomed to view making as a mental projection. It is widely believed that artifacts are realized by projecting ideas on materials. In truth, artifacts emerge from the mind, and then engage in the physical world through the body. It is not the images in the mind that creates the world; rather

it is the image in the hand. It has been said that, to be born is to be delivered into a world of action where we do not possess agency; rather we are possessed by action. Being possessed by action describes not only the physical action of our life-giving bodies, but also, it describes the action of the mind. Thinking is an action, it is kinetic and it requires dynamic mental movement.

It is this essence of kinetic movement that is so often overlooked in what seems like a stationary present. The stillness of a thing, in a moment, gives us the illusion of permanence. It is this perception of permanence that seems to require definition and objectification. These seemingly motionless, ‘projected’ mental images are categorized as artifacts; collectively these artifacts are defined as material-culture.

The perceived stillness of the stationary present accounts for only one category of object, the artifact. We can however catalogue the diversity of objects in the world into three groups: natural objects, artifacts and ideal objects. These groups exist in a continuum of objects, from physical, material objects to abstract, metaphysical objects.

The first category, that of natural objects includes trees, mountains, rocks, rivers etc and are easily recognizable. Artifacts, which account for the totality of our material-culture, are more difficult to define as they are categorized by the existence of ‘purpose’ and ‘intentionality’. Artifacts are the result of work done by a subject (be it human or otherwise) that performs a function. Function can be imposed on, or crafted from natural objects, or repurposed from one functional object to another functional object. For example, a tree stump (natural object) can become a chair (artifact), or similarly, a head of hair (natural object) can become a hairstyle (artifact). Ideal objects are maybe the most ambiguous of the three categories, as what governs these objects is not tangible. For example, the properties of a triangle exist without a mathematician; the mathematician does not invent the triangle, the mathematician discovers the properties of the triangle. These abstract, mental objects make up the third category known as ideal objects.

Humans and other sentient creatures do not fit into any of these categories. This is because humans in particular have the ability to be simultaneously a natural object and an artifact that has the ability to perceive ideal objects. Without human cognition (with the exception of other potential intelligent life), ideal objects would not be perceivable.

During antiquity, the origins of ideal objects such as mathematical shapes (lines, circles, triangles, etc) were debated. Thinkers of the time sought to know from where our conception of a circle or a straight line was derived. One side of the discourse held that people were born as a *Tabula rasa*: that all knowledge was gained from our experience in the world. On the other hand, the Platonic school of thought insisted that 'forms' were perfect ideals; the idea of a triangle, circle or straight line had been gifted to our minds, prior to being projected into the world. It was not until the Enlightenment that a system of inquiry separate to myth or mysticism was able to provide a resolution. This new way of thinking distanced itself from subjectivity and the sensations of smell, touch or taste were to be considered as sensory delusions. What was considered real were the realms of chemistry and mathematics, that is, scientific investigation. Today we are, with the help of neurophysiology, able to explain that the physical structures in the retina and nervous system provide humans with the ability to conceptualise perfect mathematical structures. The answer then to the classical problem regarding the origins of ideal objects exists between mind and experience. Similarly, the ability to imagine images of our world exists between mind and experience, in a relationship of bi-directionality. In order to imagine images humans require a relationship with the world through the eye. It is not possible to imagine what the world looks like if you have not seen the world. What we consider 'new' or 'creative' is always a synthesis of what we already know and what we discover.

Our ability to perceive ideal objects and discover 'newness' through creating may be why we experience 'otherness', that is, the feeling of being separate from the universe. Alternatively can view our lives as being the experience of the universe viewing itself. It is often asked what the meaning of life is, rather than acknowledging that meaning emerges from life. The ability to perceive ideal objects and imagine images enables, in part, our ability to make meaning in the world.

Meaning exists in our mind and between minds. Meaning is not separate from the mind. It is a product of the mind. Scholars believe it is impossible to conceive of meaning without order. Structuralists view 'meaning' to mean the translation of any kind of data into another language. For example a dictionary is expected to give you the meaning of a word with different, yet similar words. This process requires rules, as one cannot simply exchange any word or sentence for a different word or sentence and expect meaning to be made. Therefore, to speak

of meaning, is to speak of rules and visa versa. This connection stresses that the human mind needs order, as the common denominator among literate and non-literate cultures around the world is the introduction of order. The human mind is part of the universe; the need for order exists because there is some order in the universe, implying that the universe is not simply chaos.

Humans oppose chaos with order. Order can be thought of in terms of patterns. Patterns exist in many forms. Our patterns of experiences, being visual or otherwise, are employed to make meaning, often overlaying what is already known about the world on what is unknown about the world. This tendency to perceive a stimulus as an object, pattern or meaning which is already known to the observer is a phenomenon called *pareidolia*, for example, seeing faces in clouds or in cracks in the road is one expression of the phenomenon.

Pareidolia gives us insight into the process of sign making. Signs are something (signifier) that mean another thing (signified). This process of translating one thing with a different thing is a kind of representation. Representation is more than the visual description of something, it is a process of translation between languages and between minds. Representation, sign making, and meaning are all part of the semiotic process. The creation of a sign begins with 'interest'. It is the 'interest' that is the critical feature of an object selected by the sign maker in the representation. In sign making, it is not the goal to represent the object in its entirety, rather only the specific aspect in context. What is interesting to a sign maker is not always clear to the observer, such that misinterpretation and misunderstanding are commonplace. Ultimately meaning making in any communicative mode is an ambiguous process.

The process of sign making is complex and fluid; it goes beyond just representation. Sign making is generated from the intersection of a sign maker's culture, social and psychological history, in a specific context. All artifacts (including signs) obtain meaning and categorization through the process of *semiosis*, that is the process of sign making.

Linguistics is a kind of semiotic discipline, as it is the study of text and verbal signs and their meaning. Language is the most comprehensive and complex mode of meaning making, however other modes of meaning making exist, across cultures outside the realm of language such as art, fashion, hair and make-up styling, architecture, and photography etc. All modes and materials are available to be semiotised. In fact for a linguist the definition of a culture is the accumulation of interrelated modes of meaning exchange.

Material-culture, importantly includes language which expresses meaning. The unit of expression is typically the text. Similarly objects have the potential to be read through the process of semiosis, just like a text. There is meaning expressed by the object. Take hair as an example. Hair is a natural object that becomes an artifact, a hairstyle, through a creative process, which imbues meaning in context. The texture, length, volume and cut of a hair style are all modes of meaning potential. Meanings such as hierarchy, status, fashionable-ness etc can be read from the hair style within its context of situation and culture. The meaning(s) that hair signifies are available to be read by the audience. This communicative function allows hair to be read, making it like a text, a vehicle of semiosis.

The concept of semiosis developed from the idea of a sign. The term semiosis can therefore be generally understood as the study of a system of signs, a network of relationships between signs. The term 'social semiotic' accounts for this system of meaning making in a social setting. The use of the word social in conjunction with the word semiotic, in current linguistic theory is two-fold. Firstly, it is used in the sense of a social system that is synonymous with the culture. The social semiotic refers to the "social system, or culture as a system of meaning." Secondly it is used to specify the relationship between language (or other communicative modes) and social structures, seeing the social structure as one aspect of the social system. Objects have meaning making potential in a social semiotic environment.

To understand language, linguists study text. The terms, text and context put together remind us that these are two aspects of the same process. A text is always accompanied by a context. What is 'with the text' or in the case of art or fashion, 'what is with the object' goes beyond what is written or seen, it includes the verbal, non-verbal, exchange and total environment in which the text (or object) unfolds. An art or a design object, like texts are coded units of meaning. In order to understand these units, we must view them as both a product and a process. Texts and objects are processes, as they are moving through a semantic landscape of choice, existing in a network of meaning potentials. Both texts and objects are the product of their environment; they are products made from a process of decision-making. This environment is the context of the text or object. Both the context and the text (object) are 'semantic phenomena', that is, they are 'modes of meaning'. Moreover investigating these 'modes of meaning' can reveal how a social semiotic system functions. Importantly the images that Joel and I have made reveal how our social system functions.

What this shows is that, like material making, semantic-making is not fixed; it is unfolding. Meaning, like an object, is not static, it is always becoming other than what it was. Moreover, all the objects that are made in the

world have the potential to enter the social semiotic system of meaning production. Sign making begins with the representation of ideal objects and mental images. The 'interest' for a sign maker in the production of a sign is often abstracted by the overlaying social-cultural contexts with their personal psychological history. What we mean is not always what we signify. However, pinning down a meaning happens through co-definition, that is, the agreement between individuals and groups to the specificity of a signifier's meaning. The 'interest' for Joel and I has been aesthetic and not political. Nevertheless, a signifier's interest does not excuse it from ignorance.

Overwhelmingly what I have learnt from the past 2 years of study is that semantics, like materials, are in motion. They are not fixed. By accounting for the flow of things and understanding how the social semiotic system functions, we will deepen our understanding of the world and each other.

In addition to this, the physical act of making begins with our earliest experiences of play. Within play we are free to make mistakes, be it semantic or material. That does not mean we should celebrate ignorance when making or when signifying to the world. What it does mean, for me, is that empathy and understanding are essential if we are to create an environment for play and free expression. Play is an exploration; it should not be bound to outcomes per se. Our meaning, like our play, can be policed by outcome or subverted by agendas that are other than our own, be they economic, political or interpersonal. Playful making is where our ideas first enter the world through the body and in turn, the world shapes our minds. Becoming wishes to signify to its audience the importance of play, emphasizing that the most rewarding outcomes of authentic creation are found not expected.



Image 01



Image 02



Image 03



Image 04



Image 05



Image 06





Image 08



Image 09



Image 10



Image 11



Image 12



Image 13



Image 14



Image 15



Image 16



Image 17



Image 18



Image 19



Image 20



Image 21



Image 22



Image 23



Image 24



Image 23A

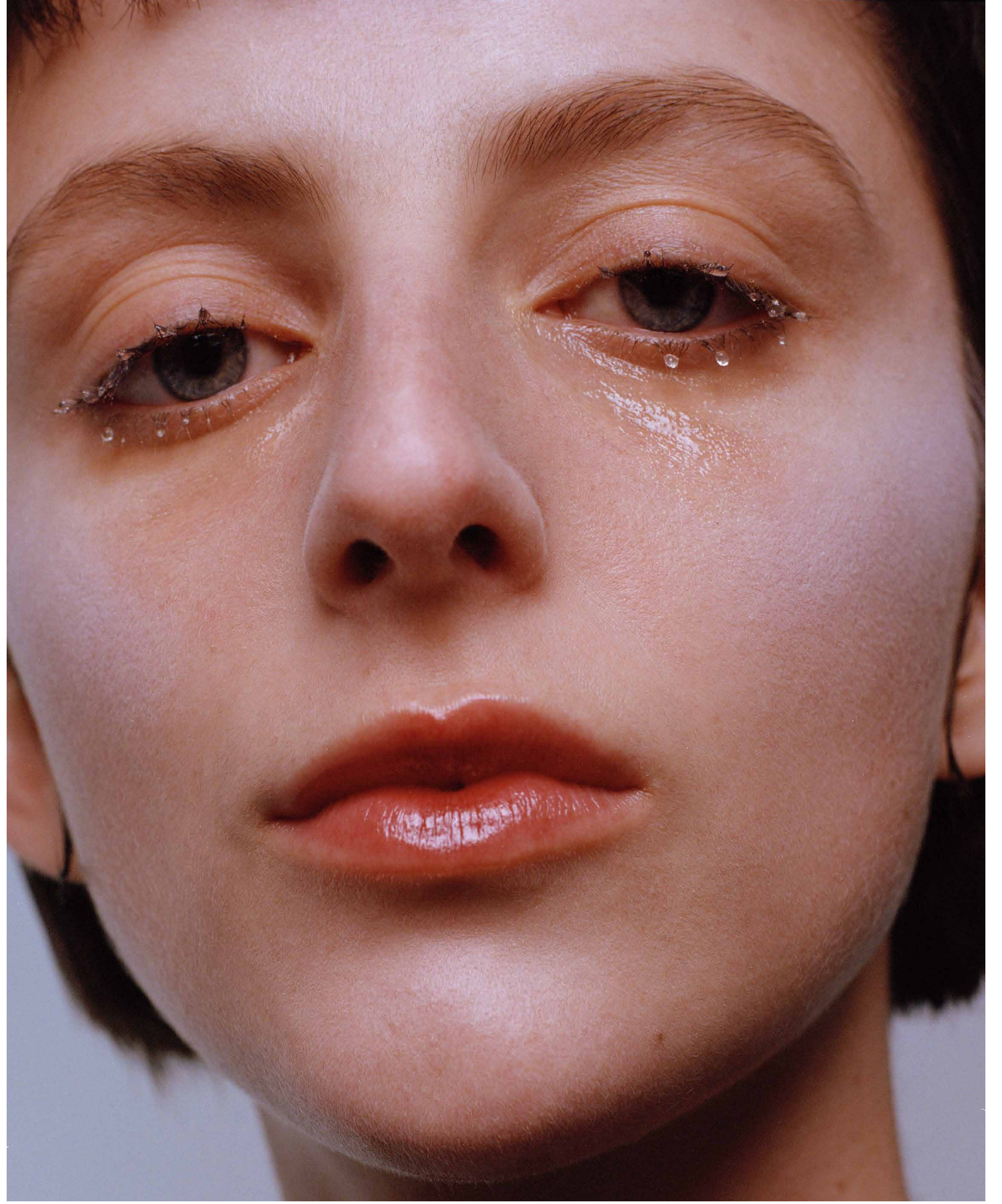


Image 24B



Image 25



Image 26



Image 27



Image 28



Image 29



Image 30

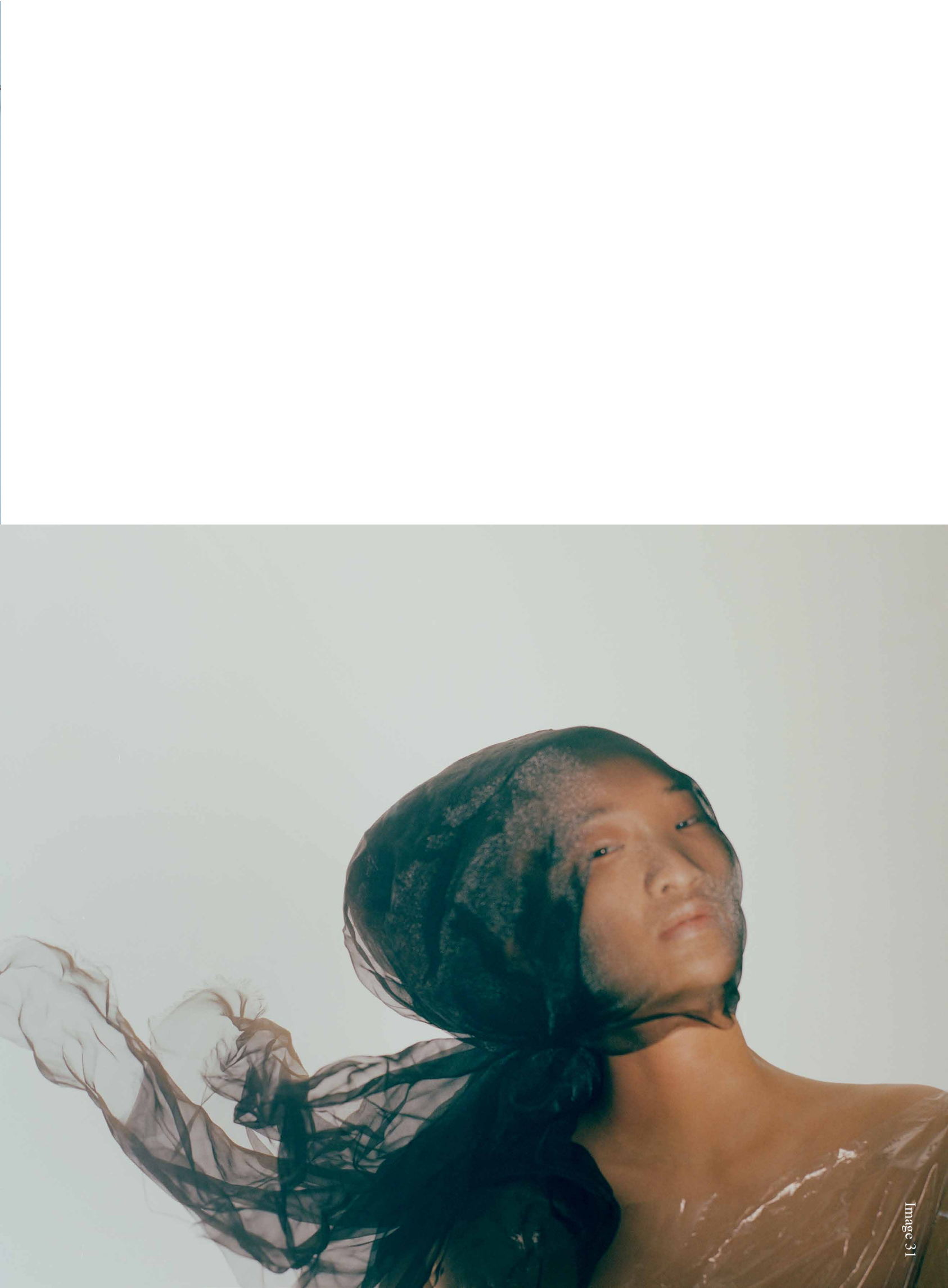


Image 31



Image 32

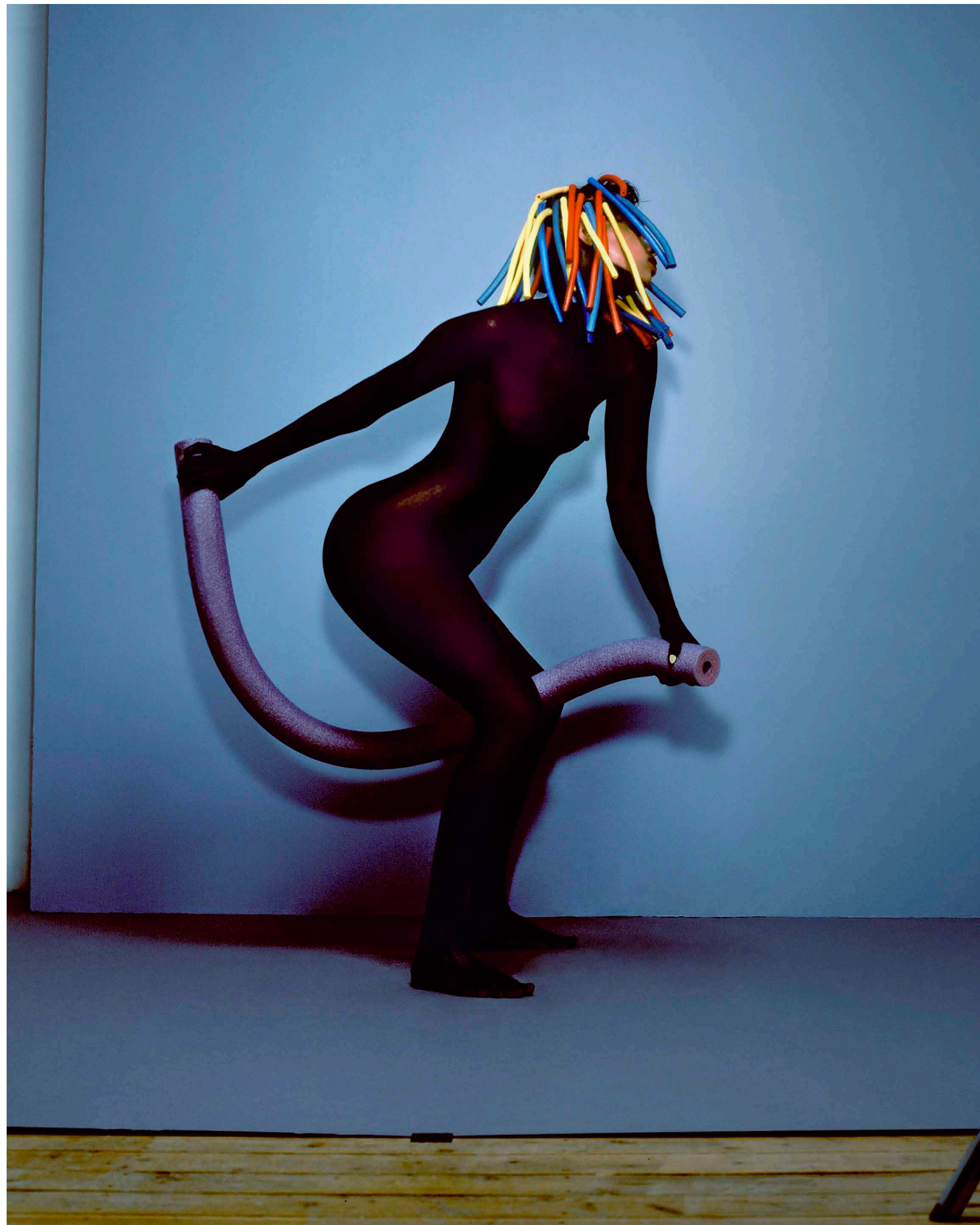


Image 33



Image 34



Image 35



Image 36



Image 37



Image 38



Image 39



Image 41



Image 42



Image 43



Image 44

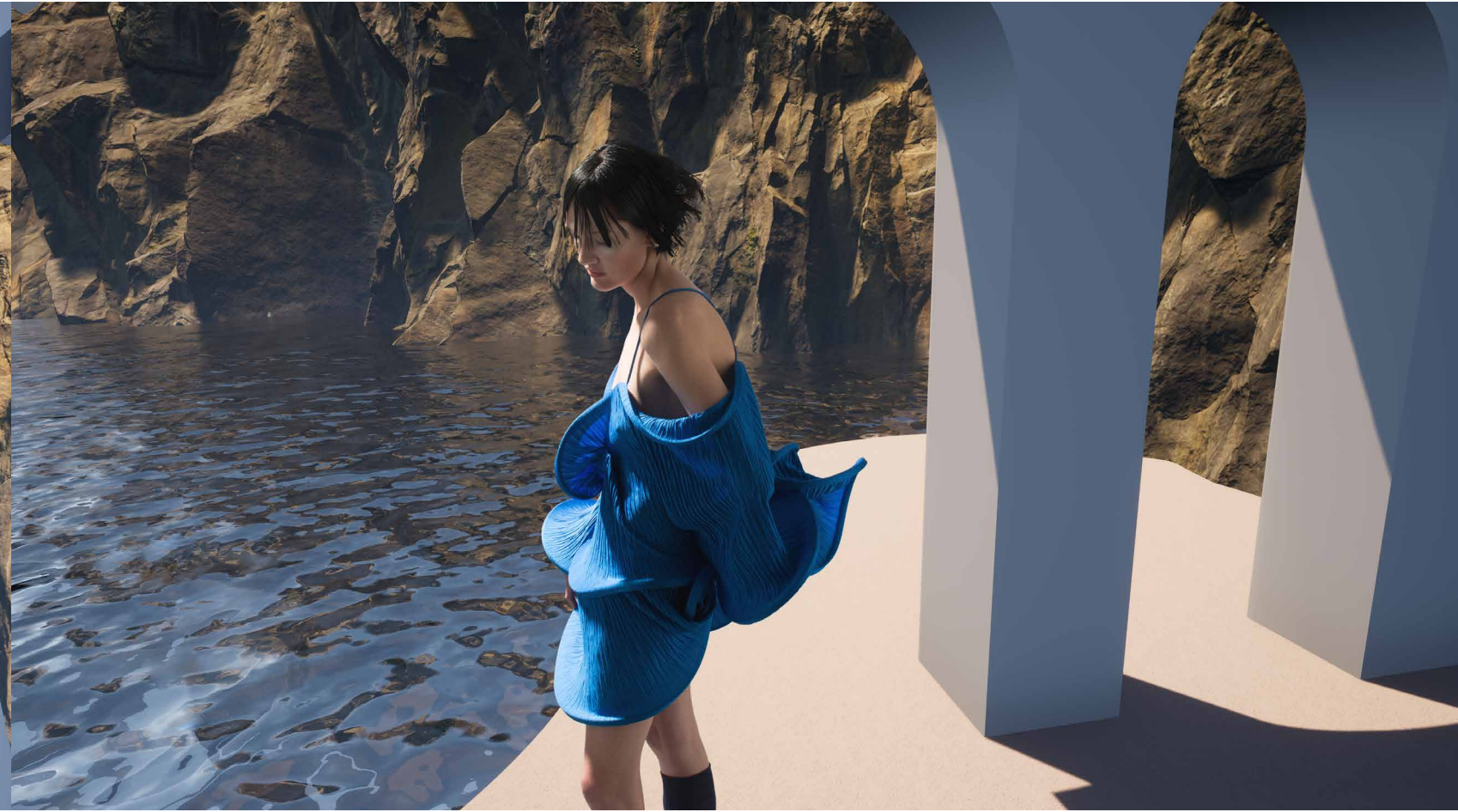


Image 45



Image 46



Image 47

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