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Edinburgh College of Art

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## UOA D32

ART AND DESIGN:  
HISTORY, THEORY AND PRACTICE



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### RESEARCHER

Mal Burkinshaw

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### OUTPUT TITLE

*Silhouettes en Dentelle*

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### OUTPUT TYPE

Fashion Design

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### DATE

2014–2019

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FIG. 1  
*Silhouettes en Dentelle*, full  
 sequence. Photos Leigh Bagley  
 & Stuart Munro.



## 01 / STATEMENT

*Silhouettes en Dentelle* is a series of eight transparent tailored jackets, designed by Burkinshaw. The jackets were made in response to historic ideals of beauty presented in the collection of Renaissance portraits at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

Burkinshaw's research explores the ways in which contemporary fashion design can learn from changing historical perceptions of body-image and ideals of beauty. Challenging normative approaches to design by directly addressing questions of gender and body shape through design and production process, it invests fashion design to stimulate discussion around contemporary issues of diversity within the fashion industry – an industry that has historically been notoriously impervious to diversity.

The work was the centrepiece of the exhibition *Beauty by Design; Fashioning the Renaissance* at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery (2014–15), the first exhibition of contemporary fashion design to be held there. The exhibition was initiated through *The Diversity Network*, a UK-wide research network addressing diversity in fashion practice, that was established in 2011 by Burkinshaw in collaboration with Professor Caryn Franklin, a renowned Fashion Commentator and co-founder of *All Walks Beyond the Catwalk*. The exhibition was a major public success, receiving over 146,000 visitors, and has initiated reassessment by the gallery of its curatorial and educational strategies.

*Silhouettes en Dentelle* was expanded and invited for inclusion in several international exhibitions at prestigious venues: The International Centre for Lace and Fashion, Calais, France (September 2016 – March 2017); The Bonnington Gallery, Nottingham, England (February – April 2018); The Shanghai Museum of Textiles and Costume, Shanghai, China (April – July 2018); Venice Design 2019 as part of the Venice Biennale, Italy (May – December 2019).

## 02 / RESEARCH DIMENSIONS



*Silhouettes en Dentelle* is a series of eight transparent tailored jackets, designed by Burkinshaw. Through the research process of garment design and production, the jackets were made to experimentally extend historic ideals of beauty presented in the collection of Renaissance portraits at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

Burkinshaw's research uses the design process to explore the ways in which historical and contemporary perceptions of body-image and ideals of beauty have influenced fashion design, and vice versa. It uses fashion design to stimulate discussion around contemporary issues of beauty and diversity within the fashion industry.

The work was presented to the public as the centrepiece of the exhibition *Beauty by Design; Fashioning the Renaissance* at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery (2014–15). Through the exhibition, Burkinshaw extended his artefact-based research into questions of effective participatory installation and diverse engagement.



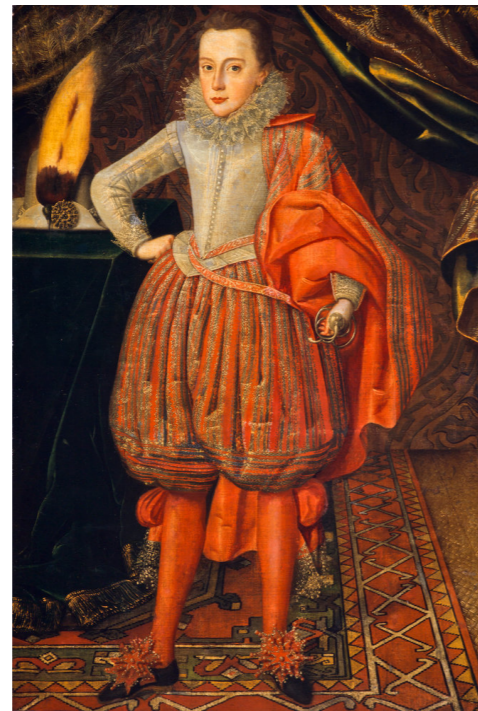
FIGS. 2 & 3  
Installation shots of Burkinshaw's jackets at *Beauty by Design; Fashioning the Renaissance*, Scottish National Portrait Gallery, 2014–2015. Photos Mal Burkinshaw.

**FIG. 4**  
Jacket by Burkinshaw, inspired by a portrait of Charles I. Photo courtesy of Leigh Bagley.



**FIG. 6**  
Jacket by Burkinshaw with Sophie Hallette Lace, inspired by a portrait of Mary Queen of Scots. Photo courtesy of Stuart Munro.

**FIG. 5**  
Charles I, Robert Peake. Courtesy of the National Galleries Scotland.



**FIG. 7**  
Mary, Queen of Scots. Artist unknown. Courtesy of the National Galleries Scotland.

## 03 / ORIGINALITY

What can Renaissance visual culture teach us about ideals of beauty and body-image? How can new design methodologies be invested to explore and provoke debates around body image and diversity?

Oriented by these research questions, Burkinshaw conceived *Silhouettes en Dentelle* as a body of fashion design to be exhibited rather than worn. Unusually for fashion garments, these jackets have never been fitted or placed on a tailor's mannequin or human body. This enabled him to challenge practices of conventional sizing, and the dominating presence of the standardised, often unhealthily-proportioned, 'fashion body' over the design process and to propose alternative methodologies that provoke reflection on body stereotypes. By removing the design process from specific models and silhouettes given in advance, Burkinshaw produced an innovative, fluid, gender-neutral tailoring collection that prompted reflection on the role of gender in determining concepts of beauty.

The innovative treatment of the traditionally feminised material lace – its use as a means of drawing attention to the body through transparency, and also its attachment to a non-gendered silhouette (lacking, for instance, the traditional nipped-in waist) – invited the audience to consider concepts of beauty as they relate to fashion and gender codes.

The designs of the jackets juxtapose historical silhouettes with contemporary fashion. Each jacket is envisioned as a visual conversation between Renaissance and present-day beauty ideals, and together the series demonstrated how historical portraiture can be reanimated through contemporary fashion to create a platform for public audiences to explore changing narratives of beauty.

*Beauty by Design* was the first exhibition of contemporary fashion design to be held at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. Bringing together art historians, curators and designers, it invited viewers to consider changing ideals of body shapes and beauty ideals from the Renaissance to the present day. In particular, it investigated how Renaissance paintings can be used to question present-day assumptions about beauty and body image. The exhibition was a major popular success and has led to the Scottish National Galleries reassessing their approaches to the educational context for and display of historical paintings.

Paintings from the Scottish National Portrait Gallery collection, used as source material by Burkinshaw.

FIG. 8  
Arnold Bronckorst, *James VI and I*,  
c. 1574. Oil on panel.



FIG. 10  
Adrian Vanson (attr), *Lady Agnes Douglas, Countess of Argyll*, 1599.  
Oil on canvas.

FIG. 9  
Robert Peake, *Charles I*, 1600–1649.  
c. 1610. Oil on canvas.



FIG. 11  
Adam de Colone, *Margaret Graham, Lady Napier*, 1626.  
Oil on canvas.

FIG. 12  
Robert Peake, *Lady Arabella Stuart*,  
1605. Oil on panel.



FIG. 13  
Artist unknown, *Esther Inglis*, 1595.  
Oil on panel.



FIG. 15  
Corneille de Lyon, *Mary of Guise*,  
c. 1537. Oil on panel.

FIG. 14  
Artist unknown, *Mary, Queen of Scots*, c. 1610–1615. Oil on canvas.

FIG. 16  
Images of 3D and digital design  
and prototyping process. Photos  
Mal Burkinshaw.



## 04 / RIGOUR

Burkinshaw's research process began with the selection of a group of portraits from the Scottish National Portrait Gallery's *Reformation to Revolution* Gallery. The works selected represent a spectrum of age, status, gender and beauty ideals, from James VI and I as a child through to Charles I, Margaret Graham and Lady Arabella Stuart.

Burkinshaw selected portraits that most directly referenced the popular body shapes, beauty ideals and fashion styles during the Renaissance. He approached each portrait as if it was a front cover of a contemporary fashion magazine, forging connections between historical and current ideas of image alteration, trends and beauty standards.

The silhouettes of the selected portraits were transposed, through digital mapping, onto non-gendered tailored jackets. Burkinshaw used the resulting silhouette as the basis for a contemporary tailored jacket prototype pattern, made to a standard size 12.

A pattern cutter was commissioned to alter this prototype to an undisclosed size, using an incorrect grading percentage, in order to subvert normal industry sizing methods. This jacket then became the master prototype for the grading of all exhibits, resulting in no standard size attributed to any garment.

Burkinshaw decided to focus on lace as his key material. This was a response to the symbolic associations of lace in the Renaissance with wealth, status and hierarchy. Whilst black lace was favoured in life, it was rarely seen in Renaissance portraiture of the time. Burkinshaw's choice to work exclusively with black lace was a means of informing contemporary audiences about important, but little-known, aspects of Renaissance material culture.

The jackets were tailored using a fine woven transparent technical mesh, chosen for its durability to withstand suspension,

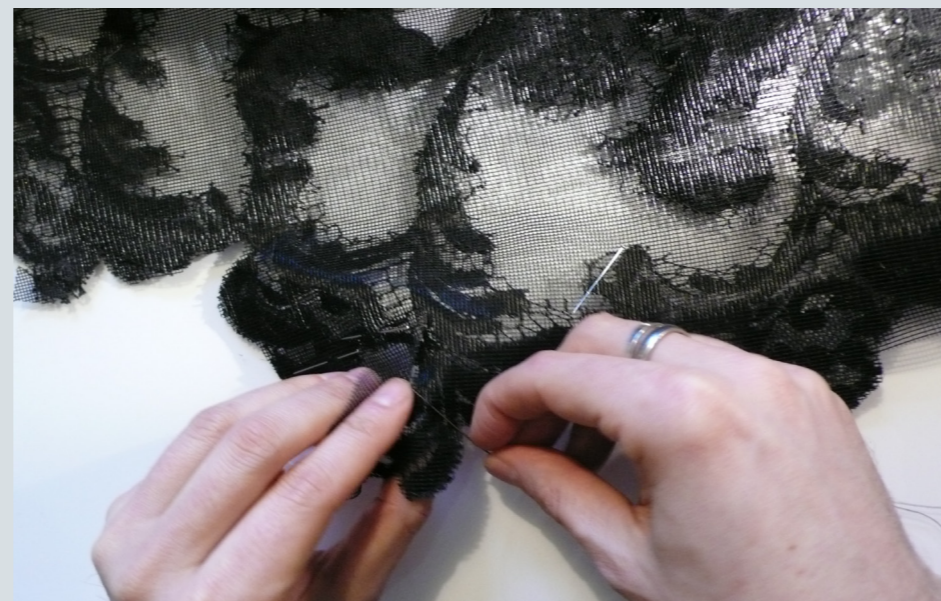
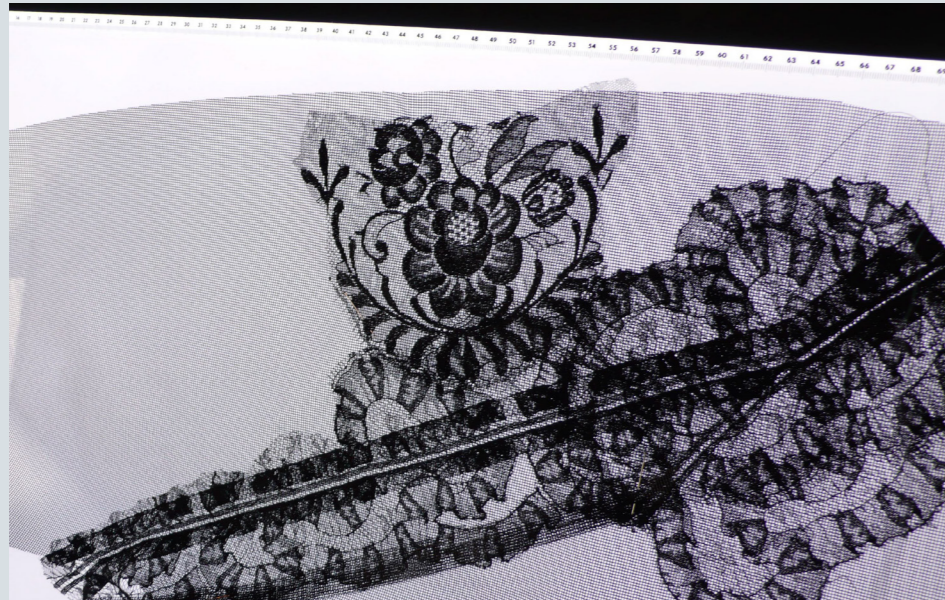
temperature and touch interaction (for visually impaired audiences). The three-dimensional constructed shape of the garments required for exhibition was created by embedding titanium and aluminium rods within complex technical seaming.

The process of designing for exhibition purposes rather than for the body offered new creative potentials but also posed restrictions within the garment structure and construction. For instance, the garments did not need to fit the body or be comfortable, but needed to exist as robust, structured, three-dimensional objects.

The lace silhouettes were manufactured through a highly technical process. The jackets were the result of over 1,000 hours of embellishment. Burkinshaw used a large light box, collaging 30 intricately cut motifs of lace, which were then applied by hand onto 'high-performance' netting. Each jacket was effectively 'painted with lace'. The lace was sponsored by Sophie Hallette, the famous French manufacturers of the highest quality lace for global fashion houses.

Transparency was a crucial element of both the design process and the final public presentation. Lightboxes were used for the production process and for the exhibition of the garments. This method of presentation exposed the detailed manufacturing processes and enabled wide public engagement, including from the visually impaired. Audiences were permitted to touch the garments, and Burkinshaw deliberately eschewed the use of mannequins, to invite interaction.

FIG. 17  
Images of manufacturing appliqué  
processes using Sophie Hallette  
Lace. Photos Mal Burkinshaw.



**FIG. 18**  
Opening event of *Beauty by Design: Fashioning the Renaissance* at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. Photo courtesy of Sam Rutherford.



**FIG. 19**  
*Beauty by Design: Fashioning the Renaissance* exhibition poster. Design by Nicky Regan.



**FIG. 20**  
*Beauty by Design: Fashioning the Renaissance* at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. Photos Mal Burkinshaw.

## 05 / SIGNIFICANCE

The *Silhouettes en Dentelle* series was created for *Beauty by Design: Fashioning the Renaissance*, an exhibition developed as a collaboration between Burkinshaw, Prof. Jill Burke (Edinburgh College of Art), Dr Patricia Allerston (Deputy Director, National Galleries of Scotland) and presented at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery (2014–2015).

The design of the exhibition was devised in collaboration with New Media Scotland and marked a significant change in the way that the National Galleries approached the curation of non-portrait focused exhibitions. The *Silhouettes en Dentelle* series was the centrepiece of the exhibition. The exhibition was visited by in excess of 146,000 people over its six months duration.

Allerston commented that, *Beauty by Design* 'was a highly innovative project for the National Galleries of Scotland. It demonstrated that 16th and 17th-century art can be relevant to contemporary artists and audiences.'

### Education programme

*Beauty by Design* was accompanied by an education programme that included lectures and gallery talks on early modern costume, cosmetics and lace, tours for those affected by dementia and the visually and hearing-impaired and workshops on historic embroidery and other textile techniques.

These events were attended by 1,166 members of the public. The National Galleries of Scotland also developed an online resource for educators, relating to the exhibition, which was designed to 'engage young people with old master collections for the future'.



FIGS. 21, 22 & 23  
Workshop and handling session  
for visually impaired participants.  
Photos courtesy of Scottish  
National Portrait Gallery.



**MAL BURKINSHAW**  
*production*

Using a light box, Mal developed a technique for 'painting with lace'.

Over 800 hours were spent embellishing the jackets by hand instinctively on a lightbox.

The final series of jackets could be worn by any gender and do not conform to standard UK size measurements.

Materials & equipment:

- Sophie Hallette lace
- Nylon netting
- Light box

*stitching lace to netting*  
*pinning lace on netting*  
*collaring lace and netting*  
*laying lace on light box*

MAIN MENU **FIGS 24, 25 & 26** NEXT

FIGS. 24, 25 & 26  
National Galleries Scotland online  
learning resources.

**MAL BURKINSHAW**  
*development*

Mal's idea was to make us question our perceptions of beauty in terms of body size and gender.

He decided to fuse a modern, classic jacket design with Renaissance fashion.

He used black lace and developed a close collaboration with Sophie Hallette lace. Mal developed a technique involving laying lace on a lightbox, the lace was mirrored so the effect is symmetrical. He called the result 'X-ray lace silhouettes'.

*topical historical lace patterns*  
*white contours*

MAIN MENU NEXT

***Silhouettes en Dentelle - Series 1, (Lace Silhouettes - Series 1)***  
by MAL BURKINSHAW  
*inspiration*

From studying old master paintings in the National Galleries of Scotland collection, Mal was influenced by the portrait of Margaret Graham, especially the decorated white lace jacket worn under her black dress. He was inspired by how lace in these times showed wealth and status.

Black lace was popular during the Renaissance but rarely seen in portraiture of the time.

*LACE = WEALTH + STATUS*  
*Decorated lace jacket under the overdress - extremely fashionable for court ladies in the early 1600s*  
*elaborately embroidered flower muffs*

MAIN MENU NEXT

**Exhibitions**

*Silhouettes en Dentelle* has been included in the following international exhibitions.

**September 2016 – March 2017**

*Solo Exhibition*

**The International Centre For Lace and Fashion, Calais, France**

The exhibition included the commission of an eighth lace jacket design. It was the first time an academic, practice-based, researcher had been showcased in this museum, devoted to the history of lace. Burkinshaw's work was shown alongside work by design houses including Christian Dior, Balenciaga and Iris Van Herpen. It was curated by Shazia Boucher, the Museum Director.

**February – April 2018**

*Lace Unarchived*

**The Bonnington Gallery, Nottingham, England**

An exhibition which brought together a diverse group of designers, selected for their unique and contemporary interpretations of lace. Sophie Hallette Lace is produced on traditional looms designed and built in Nottingham, and Burkinshaw invited audiences to understand the significance of Nottingham as part of the global, high-fashion lace industry. Curated by Tom Godfrey, Dr Amanda Briggs-Goode and Sarah Connor.

**April – July 2018**

*Beauty By Design: Solo Exhibition*  
**The Shanghai Museum of Textiles and Costume, Shanghai, China**

This solo exhibition was programmed as part of Shanghai Fashion Week, and explored cultural conversations between Western and Eastern fashion, featuring a published catalogue titled 'Beauty By Design: Fashioning the Renaissance' (see Appendix on page 22).

The exhibition included a wide variety of curated lace samples, sponsored by Sophie Hallette, presenting the history of Western Lace. It also included large scale copies of the key portraits from the Scottish National Portrait Gallery collection, which Burkinshaw interpreted for *Silhouettes en Dentelle*. Curated by Dr Gillian Li and Zhe Wang.

**May – December 2019**

*Venice Design 2019*

**Palazzo Michiel, Venice, Italy**

Burkinshaw was invited to exhibit by the European Cultural Centre. The exhibition showcased the work of 50 designers from 30 countries as part of La Biennale di Venezia 2019. The show was attended by 200,000 people and was accompanied by an exhibition catalogue (see Appendix on page 22).

**FIG. 27**

The eighth jacket commissioned by The International Centre For Lace and Fashion, Calais, designed by Mal Burkinshaw with lace by Sophie Hallette. Photo courtesy of Stuart Munro.



**FIG. 30**

*Lace Unarchived* at The Bonnington Gallery, Nottingham. Photo by Julian Lister.



**FIG. 28**

*Solo Exhibition* at The International Centre For Lace and Fashion, Calais, France. Photo Mal Burkinshaw.



**FIG. 29**

*Solo Exhibition* at The International Centre For Lace and Fashion, Calais, France. Photo courtesy of The International Centre for Lace and Fashion, Calais.



**FIGS. 31–34**  
*Beauty By Design: Solo Exhibition*  
The Shanghai Museum of Textiles  
and Costume, Shanghai, China.  
Photos Mal Burkinshaw.



**VENICE  
DESIGN**

**FIGS. 35–38**  
Venice Design 2019, Palazzo  
Michiel. Photos Mal  
Burkinshaw.

# 06 / APPENDIX

## Programme

Exhibition programme from *Beauty by Design: Fashioning the Renaissance*, Scottish National Portrait Gallery, 2014–2015.

## Catalogue

Exhibition catalogue from *Venice Design 2019*. Palazzo Michiel, Venice, Italy.

## Catalogue

Exhibition catalogue from *Beauty by Design: Solo Exhibition*, The Shanghai Museum of Textiles and Costume, Shanghai, China.

## Publications

*Fashion Drawing, Second Edition: Illustration Techniques for Fashion Designers* Michele Wesen Bryant, ISBN 9781780678344. Published 4 July 2016.

*Selvedge Journal*, article on contemporary lace, featuring the ‘most innovative and ground-breaking textile and fashion practitioners from all fields’. Published May 2018.

**Adam de Colone**



Margaret Graham, Lady Napier, by Adam de Colone, 1626. Oil on canvas. Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh 2004. P.2 2004

**P**ale-skinned and auburn-haired, Margaret Graham looks straight at us. At the time of this painting she had been married for eight years and had several children. Described as ‘a woman religious, chaste and beautiful’ by her husband, Sir Archibald Napier, we know from his memorial that Margaret died soon after this portrait was painted. Her husband held important positions in the courts of James VI & I and Charles I, who was crowned in 1626. He was a staunch supporter of the monarchy, attracting criticism from Scottish puritan groups later in life.

Margaret is shown wearing the elaborate fashion of the Jacobean court. Her low-cut black overdress shows off the pale skin of her chest. The dress is trimmed lavishly with gold thread and pearls at the collar and below its fashionable pointed bodice. It opens to reveal a red velvet underskirt patterned in gold, and again at the sleeves to show her white linen jacket, elaborately embroidered with flower motifs. These decorated jackets, some of which still survive, were extremely fashionable for court ladies in the early 1600s. White lace features prominently in the outfit, at her cuffs and in the wired stiff collar that forms a semicircle behind her shoulders.

**Mal Burkinshaw**



‘Silhouettes en Dentelle’ - Series 1 (Black Silhouettes - Series 1) by Mal Burkinshaw, 2013-14. High performance lace, hand-applied onto tailored jackets in nylon netting. Collection of the artist © Mal Burkinshaw. Photo: David Hogg

**M**al Burkinshaw’s series responds to the body shapes and garments on view in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery’s *Reformation to Revolution* Gallery. Sources of inspiration include the portraits of Margaret Graham, Lady Napier, Mary, Queen of Scots, James VI & I as a boy, Lady Arabella Stuart and Lady Agnes Douglas (illustrated on last page). His work fuses the modern classic jacket with renaissance fashion, creating a dialogue between past and present notions of ‘normalised’ body shapes through a metamorphosis of silhouette and scale. The jackets do not conform to standard UK size measurements and are non-gender specific, inviting us to question our perceptions of beauty relating to body size.

The series has developed from a close collaboration with renowned lace producer Sophie Hallette. It highlights the centuries of highly skilled activity involved in making this delicate material, which was a signifier of wealth, status and hierarchy in the Renaissance. The jackets reinstate the wearing of black lace during the period; although favoured, it is rarely seen in portraiture of the time. They are the result of over 800 hours of embellishment. Mal used a large light box, collaging intricately cut motifs of lace, which were then applied by hand onto ‘high-performance’ netting. The process of creating each piece was both reactive and instinctive; in a sense, each jacket has been ‘painted with lace’.

**FIG. 39**  
Exhibition leaflet from *Beauty by Design: Fashioning the Renaissance*, Scottish National Portrait Gallery, 2014–2015. Design by Nicky Regan.



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