



“A Hairry”

Situation”

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# “A Hairy Situation”

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE RELATIONSHIP  
OF FIBRE; NORMALISATION OF USING  
WASTE BY-PRODUCT MATERIALS WITHIN THE  
TEXTILES INDUSTRY.

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# Rationale.

## MOTIVATION.

With the impact of overconsumption and fast paced lifestyles, we are depleting the earth's resources rapidly. Since becoming intrigued into the world of fibre, its origins, production and process, I have built a vendetta towards cotton and synthetics. Why are we exhausting and harming the resources we have, to try and keep up with an overwhelming and unachievable demand? Although cotton is a natural fibre, the process required to grow, cultivate, mercerise and produce it is intensive. The sheer volume of water alone is enough to question its use before taking into account the chemicals, labour, land and dyeing of the fibre. Cotton takes nutrients out of the soil when it's grown, so the land can only be used a couple of times before it is deemed useless, this results in the need for more land thus cutting down rainforests. Synthetic yarns are of course just glorified plastic. Therefore, unable

to biodegrade, building up landfill and filling our water systems with micro-plastic. Something needs to change, and that is the motivation behind my MA project. Inspired by fibre and material, I aim to identify materials that are readily available to us. Materials that don't require hours of intensive labour, excessive amounts of water and chemicals to be produced and that won't harm the environment in the long run. Materials that would otherwise be discarded and overlooked, encouraging people to be open to the use of what we have around us, opening their minds to the possibilities of using unconventional and taboo material such as hair. "A Hairy Situation" aims to produce high quality textiles made from otherwise discarded fibre, encouraging individuals to question the excessive use of cotton and synthetics within the industry.

*“The fashion industry relies on water throughout the production process for textiles and garments. It takes on average 10,000–20,000 litres of water to cultivate just one kilogram of raw cotton depending on where it is grown. Cotton is the most widely used natural material and the second most-produced fibre globally accounting for 24 percent of global fibre production in 2020.” (The Issues: Water, 2022)*

TANGLED | INTERTWINED | MANIPULATED | UNCONVENTIONAL | HAIRY | SLEEK | FRIZZY | SHARP

SHINE | CRIMPED | FLOW | MOULD | FORM | ADAPT | MOVEMENT | SILKY | CONNECTED

“A Hairy Situation”

# — Context.

## CONTEXT

After some initial research, it's clear that the industry can't continue the way it is. Mass production, mass consumption and continued unachievable demand leading to landfill overflow is a big worry. With fashion and textiles being the second largest polluter of the earth, something needs to change. Although the issue is heavily based on consumer behavior, I feel that the materials that are being used also play a huge part in making a difference. Encouraging individuals to understand and educate themselves on what their items are made from is a great start to challenging the issues we're facing. What is the need for synthetic and plastic yarns when a more than suitable naturally occurring fibre could be used instead? Our ancestors used to use whatever materials they had around them, for example in continents before we had sheep, natives would use dog fur to spin into yarn to make clothes and textiles. "People have been making chiengora for

*"Thousands of tons of combed-out undercoat from dogs are thrown away every year as a by-product of pet care. We developed high-quality Chiengora out of it – regional, resource-friendly and fluffy soft." (Chiengora® ?, 2022)*

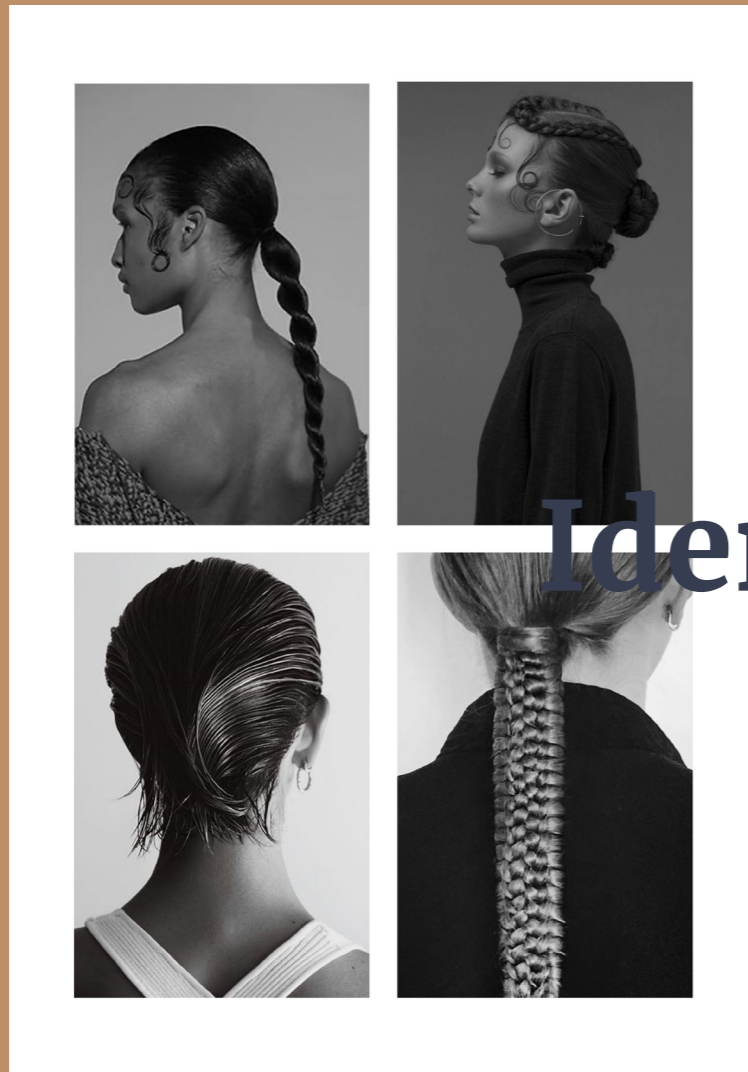
a long time, though the practice fell out of favour when sheep's wool started to become readily available. Before the 1800s, the Coast Salish people of what is now British Columbia and Washington State commonly kept Salish Woolly dogs and blended the animals' hair with other fibres, such as mountain goat hair, before weaving it into clothing and blankets." (The Most Sustainable Fibre You've Never Heard Of: Chiengora, 2022). So why is it deemed so 'weird' and 'grotesque' to do so now? There are companies out there spinning brushed dog fur waste and producing luxury yarns and products from this very much overlooked and discredited fibre. "Did you know that every year over 1000 tons of fine, combed undercoat is simply thrown away by dogs or cats during grooming? At the same time, other animals are bred, tortured to obtain this raw material. We want to change this system error." (Chiengora® ?, 2022).



FIG 2.

# Biological

# Fashion



# Identity

FIG 3.

## CONTEXT

Being inspired by unusual, overlooked materials I started to think more about “hair” in general. “The amount of hair waste that amounts through natural shedding, hair-cuts and discarded extensions and wigs is phenomenal. Each year, the hairdressing industry produces enough waste to fill 50 football stadiums, according to research conducted by the group. Much of it gets dumped on landfills, despite the potential of reuse for hair waste.” (UK: Hairdressers find sustainable use for hair waste, 2022). To me, hair is an incredible fibre, but just because it is grown from a human rather than an animal people are quick to disregard it, labelling it ‘disgusting’ and ‘unhygienic’. If anything, humans are considered far cleaner than most animals, so what’s wrong with our ‘fur’ or ‘wool’?

Hair has always been a big inspiration to me, from considering being a hairdresser when I was little, teaching myself how to braid my own hair at 7 years old, dying my hair for the first time at the age of 10 to now constantly switching up my look and identity with different hairstyles, colours and even extensions. Hair to me is biological fashion, I express myself through the way I style my hair more advertently than I do through clothes. I want to bring this across through using the fibre in conjunction with textiles. Educating and inspiring people along the way, hair in-fact is an exciting material with so much potential as opposed to

this ‘taboo’ thing that once disconnected from our body is ‘disgusting’ and ‘useless’. “Like fashion and dress, hair can be situated as a fundamental part of ‘the means by which bodies are made and given meaning and identity.” (Biddle-Perry., 2008: Pg. 3)

Hair is of course more than just a fibre, its significance to us as a species is fascinating. Our identity is heavily relied on the way we look, and our hair has a strong influence on that. “They are also the most ubiquitous because everyone does something with their hair – and even when the choice is to do nothing, a definite sartorial statement is being made.”(Biddle-Perry., 2008: Pg. 3). I feel that it is a hard material to ignore, the power it holds over us as individuals is interesting. The cultural ethics it holds as well as the impact it has on us if we lose it is something quite astonishing. I want my textiles to have meaning and purpose and by using materials such as hair and dog fur, I hope to reconnect people with the understanding of what our clothes and such are made from. “Clothes made from a critter you know and love are just so much more special than clothes from some anonymous sheep. What could be more delightful than wearing mittens from your Malamute, or a sweater from your Samoyed?” (The Most Sustainable Fibre You’ve Never Heard Of: Chiengora, 2022).

# 'The Power of Hair'

## CONTEXT

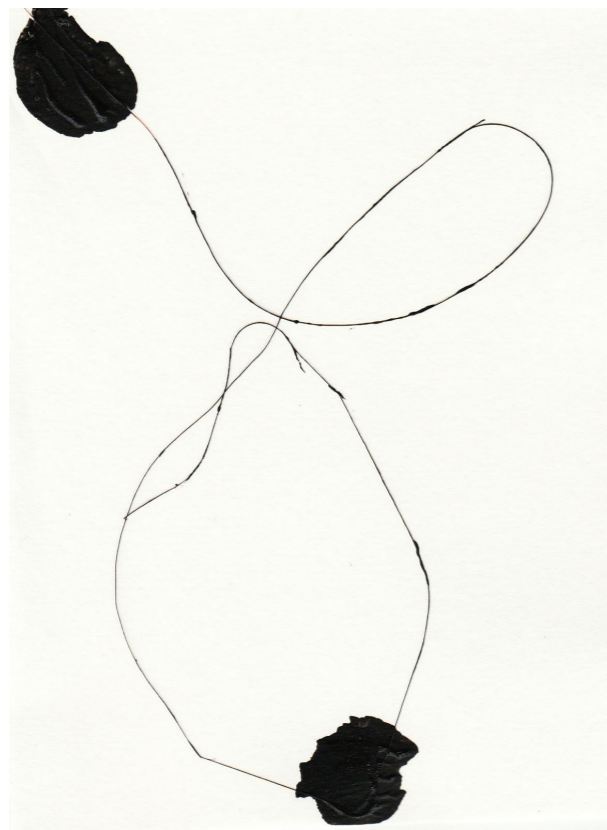


FIG 4.

I want to celebrate hair as a fibre. As someone who has witnessed family members become upset through the loss of their hair due to cancer treatment and personally struggling with scalp psoriasis, I know the impact our hair has on us as individuals. I want to encourage people to see hair as form of expression, on and off the body.

When on the body it is adored. Curled, crimped, straightened, cut, extended, braided, waxed, brushed and so on, the hair is experimented and played with in an exciting and beautiful way. I aim to bring that same excitement through to textiles, exploring these key words and sparking new connections within woven textiles and hair.

“They are also the most ubiquitous because everyone does something with their hair – and even when the choice is to do nothing, a definite sartorial statement is being made.”

(Biddle-Perry., G., 2008. Hair: Styling, Culture and Fashion. Oxford ; New York : Berg, p.2.)

Similarly to dog fur, hair isn't a new revelation material. Historically it was heavily used in the Victorian era to create beautiful works of art, whether that was special mourning jewellery incorporating a loved one's lock of hair, or intricately designed and curated pieces of art to proudly display in your home; now of which are rare antique art works.

"Hair work wasn't really about death, even when it's in memorial to someone who died. It's about sentiment and emotion and showing people how you're related to others. Making hair work was a proper middle-class, feminine task, grounded in a consumer culture. It was a way to tend to your family and home." (Trendy Victorian-Era Jewelry Was Made From Hair, 2022)



FIG 5.

# — Aims + Objectives.

## PROJECT.

1. *Identifying* the fibre and material issues within the textiles industry currently and highlighting the impact this is having on the environment.

- Researching into the current issues and problems that we face from overconsumption.
- The impact of growing and harvesting these crops and developing these synthetic fibres in order to keep up with the demand of “fast fashion” and “throw-away culture”
- Understanding why we feel we need to use these materials within the industry, what is it about them that is so admirable?
- Researching alternatives to encourage and educate people to purchase more consciously of the planet.

2. *Discover* materials and resources that would otherwise go to waste and explore their potential.

- Be open to exploring and experimenting with materials that may otherwise be considered ‘weird’, ‘unusable’ or ‘outlandish’
- Research into the materials; do they have historic uses? (Dog fur), do they have useful, undisclosed properties? (human hair – oil absorbing etc)
- Open people’s minds to using ‘taboo’ materials, what is it about them that makes people uncomfortable?
- Encourage new designers and customers to consider the materials their items are made from and explore new possibilities
- Surprise people with my high end/luxurious materials made from materials that would otherwise go to waste.

3. *Design* and *connect* with materials in new and exciting ways, pushing my technical skills within weaving and experiment further with other disciplines.

- Push my weaving skills further to explore the relationship between structure and fibre, not necessarily over complicating structures or threading plans but using basics and techniques to understand the connection between cloth and fibre even further
- Push my spinning skills to work with unconventional materials – pushing the norm and having fun with the discipline
- Mainly sticking to traditional and hand crafts to bring back the slow, high-quality craftsmanship as well as historical and cultural ways of approaching textiles that have been lost in the fast paced, low quality, throw-a-way era.



4. *Create* and *develop* high quality, sustainably sourced materials from fibre to cloth that can be applied to a range of applications.

- I want to produce high quality, durable and sustainably produced materials that will challenge current materials on the market

- I want to create niche but beautiful fabrics from 'ugly' and 'discarded' materials that can challenge today's most used materials such as cotton and synthetics.

- I am not designing specifically for any target market; however, the materials are likely to lend themselves towards useable art pieces with the possibility of commercial application.

5. *Push* the boundaries of conventional materials and *educate* consumers.

- Don't be confined by 'normal' and 'standard' ways of producing materials, experiment and explore as much as possible and push boundaries

- Use my design journey to educate and intrigue customers as well as upcoming designers to break out of the mould of using conventional materials that they know and experiment and have fun with the process.

6. Develop and expand as a designer.

- Push myself in areas such as visual research to develop my handwriting.

- Discover new and exciting ways of working and expand on my skills for post MA.

- Document and share my progress throughout my MA to further grow my social media presence for post MA and freelance / studio work

- Make contacts and take advantage of opportunities that will further push me into solo independence post MA (worshipful company of weavers, QEST, Spark Test IT etc)

- Successfully set myself up as a practitioner and gain local recognition for my studio practice.



FIG 6.

# Methodology.

MOOD BOARDS | VISUAL RESEARCH | HAND-PROCESSES | WEAVING | SPINNING | SKETCHBOOK  
| CONTEXTUAL RESEARCH | MARKET RESEARCH | FIBRE RESEARCH | BOOKS | MAGAZINES  
| ARTICLES | WORKSHOPS | FEEDBACK | INTERACTION | EXPERIMENTATION | TECHNICAL  
RESEARCH | REFLECTIVE PRACTICE | PORFOLIO | SOCIAL MEDIA | EXHIBITIONS.

# Inspiration.

## CONTEXTUAL.



FIG 7.

Zsofia Kollar sees hair as a vital material that could revolutionise the textile industry. Highlighting the issues of fast-fashion and over consumptive behaviour she aims to encourage people to see hair as more than a waste product of our biology and instead a vital tool to producing sustainable materials.

“Can we care as much about our planet as with our beauty? Can we turn our beauty obsessions into a sustainable system that can have a positive

impact on our environment?” Highlighting hairs incredible properties, Kollar has conducted in depth research into the fibre to support her argument in implementing hair to the industry. Hair has a variety of positive attributes including being non-toxic, high tensile strength, lightweight, thermally insulating, elastic recovery and oil-absorbing. Kollar explains that in Europe, 72 million kilograms of human hair ends up in landfills or in the drainage system yearly.

“Human hair is a well-known material, but once it is cut off from our heads nobody sees it as a material. Human hair is a valuable material, however it goes to waste in large amounts all over the world. Cities as farms, waste as material, the way to change the textile industry are on our heads.”

(Studio Zsofia Kollar. 2021.)

# Alexandra

# Kohl



FIG 8, 9, 10.

Exploring the process of weaving in conjunction with horsehair, Alexandra Kohl produces contemporary wall hangings. Delicately approached and meticulously woven, Kohl ensures her weaves are orderly, producing high quality, one-of-a-kind artworks ready to be sold. Pushing her work further, Kohl also applies her unique textiles to commercial items such as furniture and cushions, further pushing the narrative of using otherwise overlooked materials.

# Mona Hatoum.

Mona Hatoum uses hair within her work as she sees hair as a human product. In the same way that wool is the product of sheep it is material evidence of the self. “Uprooted, nomadic, the margins of the physical self become the borders of what is experienced as home.” (Mona Hatoum’s hair, 2022). Hatoum has created works using simple tools, (hands and loom), from available material (hair). “They have a fragile, ephemeral quality. A faint breath of wind might carry them off. They’re vulnerability to being overlooked or thrown out.” (Mona Hatoum’s hair, 2022). Using similar connotations to the Victorians use of hair, Hatoum challenges this with the use of preserved hair to carry the suggestion of multiple bodies, some of which growing older. “They’re a record of lives ongoing – rather than ones departed.” (Mona Hatoum’s hair, 2022). I admire the connection here between hair as a material and the legacy it holds, intertwining my thoughts between the power of hair regarding identity as well as the usability and positive qualities of hair as a material.

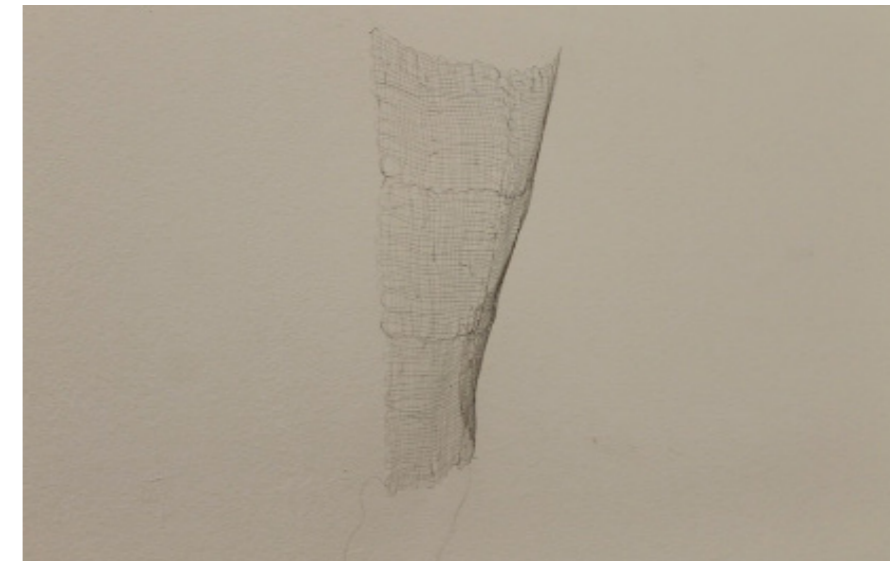


FIG 11.

HAIR GRIDS WITH KNOTS.

# — Outcome.

## OUTCOME

My goal is to create high quality textiles, compromised of otherwise discarded materials to challenge the current excessive use of cotton and synthetics within the industry. The specific outcome or application is unknown at this point, as I do not wish to limit my experimental possibilities through delegating an intended final product. However, I do envisage my materials sparking curiosity and intrigue, whether that is through exhibiting of my work as fine art, narrative pieces or as usable material that highlights the importance of utilising what we have around us, as opposed to depleting out earth's resources. Whatever the outcome, I hope to produce a breadth of experimental fabrics that have pushed the potential of unusual and controversial materials that will ignite a difference within our industry. Identifying myself as a practitioner, whether that be 'Textile Artist' or 'Designer' I hope to inspire future creatives to question their fibre and material choice and break down the stigma of 'waste' products.

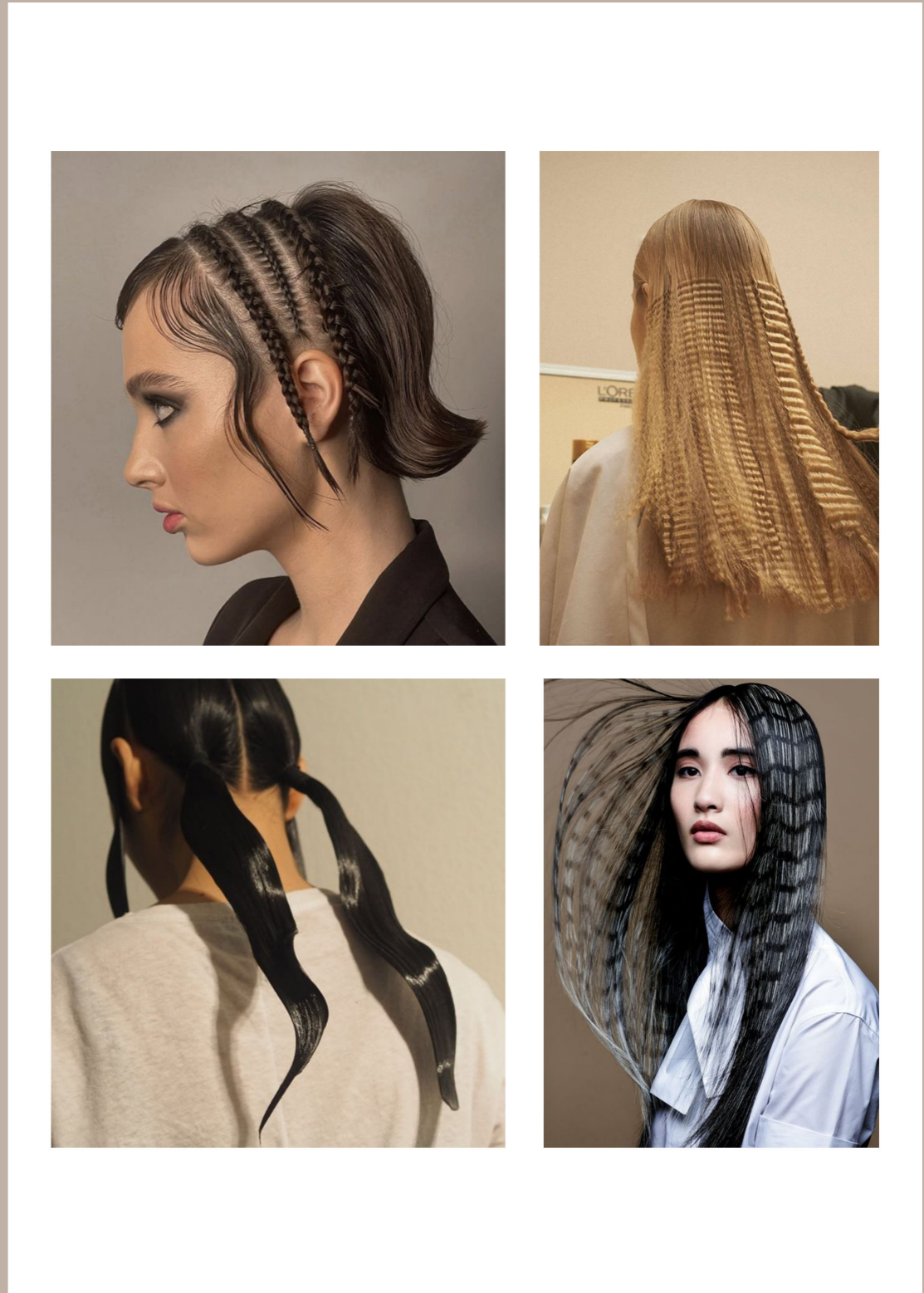


FIG 12.

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Fig 1: Own Image

Fig 2: modus intarsia. 2022. Chiengora® ?.

Fig 3: Hair Inspiration – Pinterest Board (C.2022) By Pinterest

Fig 4: Own Image

Fig 5: Culture. 2022. Trendy Victorian-Era Jewelry Was Made From Hair.

Fig 6: Own Image

Fig 7: Studio Zsofia Kollar. 2021. Studio Zsofia Kollar.

Fig 8, 9 + 10: Alexandra Kohl. 2022. Alexandra Kohl

Fig 11. Kvadratinterwoven.com. 2022. Mona Hatoum's hair.

Fig 12: Hair Inspiration – Pinterest Board (C.2022) By Pinterest