

Project Outline

Background.

The 'outsize' clothing market is expanding; the average British woman has a proportionally larger stomach and waist than her 1950's counterpart, and is a size 16. (Established by the recent size survey SizeUK). Paradoxically, women of size 16 and above find clothes shopping frustrating, humiliating and fruitless. By 2006 half the women in Britain will be 40 or older. There is much evidence and research to support the fact that aging effects body shape, one example being that women tend to thicken at the waist, so the standard sizes adhered to by manufacturers will no longer apply. UK retailers are slowly beginning to recognise this trend, and this research is aimed at supplying some of the information needed to make this transition.

Research Questions.

Is the primary value of knitted fabric on larger bodies its inherent stretch? This research questions whether such a method of achieving fit is satisfactory by exploring shaping methods in combination with direct body shape data. It also challenges the 'norm' of the size 12 woman, (disproved by SizeUK findings) and the horror of fat which is demonstrated from haute couture to the high street.

Methods.

A pilot study has commenced, the results of which will be available by June 2005. Samples are knitted on a 12gge Shima Seiki 102ff machine and SDS1 system at the University of Brighton. This versatility pursues a thread of the research; enabling bespoke knitwear through a dynamic, digital relationship with the consumer.

Conclusions to date.

Relationships between body shape and fabric is currently found to be the most contentious over protruding parts of the body, specifically bust, hips, stomach and particularly around the shoulders. Space between body and knitting over concave body areas is directly influenced by the degree of ease introduced elsewhere. The investigation of ease and its application to specific areas represents the ongoing practical content of the research.

Exhibition

Work stemming from this research formed part of the summer 2006 exhibiton "Blurring the Boundaries, Contemporary Knitting and Fashion" at Fairfield Museum and Gallery, Sydney, Australia