FEMME: extinct stereotypes

16 - 26.05.2050

Konstfack project report by
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1. Summary of the project

My research is about stereotypes of women. Responding to scepticism towards feminist movements, my degree project aims to challenge the power structure of today’s Western society. How does visual communication play a big role in creating and/or reproducing inequalities?

I have created a retro-futuristic exhibition, placed in an imaginary museum. In a utopian world based in 2050, the exhibition *femme: extinct stereotypes*, aims to show, explain and deconstruct how women were portrayed around 2020; how society and (pop)culture were deforming humans into stereotypical women.

I have created a speculative scenario through different objects and artifacts displaying the expectations and instructions on how women should or should not behave. By showcasing the past and its conventions, this retro-futuristic exhibition questions their normality and rationality.
Our daily life is routinised by a continuously growing flow of images, turning it into a culture itself. With technologies – both tyrannical and emancipatory – swiping, scrolling, double tapping is becoming our new way of communicating.

Images we like, share and post define who we are in this society of selfieobsession. Our own image on screen is sometimes even more important than the one offline.

Pop culture forms a significant role model. Even though brands are making an effort in what is referred to as body positivism, men are still seen as the sexless, white as the colourless, cis as the real, and so on.
The stereotypical representations, especially of women, are still visually strong and damaging. Violence against women is still normalised. Women are expected to be young, thin, pale, sexualised from young age and have to fit in the feminine beauty standards.

I’m not only talking about a single visual. It is the repetition of cliched images that have consequences. Making us apply different kinds of values to ourselves. Unspoken rules are telling us what we should be, what we should do, what we should or shouldn’t say. By creating a norm that is narrow, it is also producing stereotypes.
During my studies in visual communication, I often felt there was no space to think about images and narratives we were producing, and their impact on society. The beginning of my researches had started there; when I was questioning images around me, the ones I grew up with, the ones I am using, the ones I am confronted by every day.

I have articulated my research around this question: Can we change power structures by challenging the way we are communicating through text and images?

In the same way people are revealing hierarchies by deconstructing the way we speak, write or act, I want to investigate in my field; how some power structures are reproduced by images and narratives?
Collecting references

I started my project by collecting images and inspirations. I have divided them in different categories starting with these three:

- **VISUAL INSPIRATION**, research about the graphic design style, fonts, images, etc.
- **CONTENT INSPIRATION**, gathering of screenshot, memes, and other interesting images connecting with the research
- **INSPIRATIONAL PROJECTS**, artists’ projects inspirational for their idea and/or concept

Then later in the process I had created two others.

- **INSTALLATION**, was gathering images of inside and outside installations
- **LIGHT DESIGN**, the light design became an important part of my project so I have collected light ambiance images

This library of images became the references for my project. Giving me inspiration, I had them in the back of my head all along my project. It has helped me to take decisions, about design and concept.
All along this research, I have been reading theories that were connecting with my subject and society. Some were more feminist theories, others were more about utopias.

My principal readings:

- **Robin di Angelo**  
  – *White Fragility*  
  *Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*

- **bell hooks**  
  – *From margin to center*  

- **Roxane Gay**  
  – *Bad Feminist*

- **Foucault**  
  – *Of other spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*  

- **Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams**  
  – *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work*  

- **Ervin Goffman**  
  – *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*  

- **Roxane Gay**  
  – *Bad feminist*
Melani De Luca
– Post Butt: The Power of the Image

Laboria Cuboniks
– Xenofeminist manifesto

Crimethink Workers Collective
– Days of War Nights of Love

Mona Chollet
– Beauté fatale

Guerilla Girls
– Bitches, Bimbos and Ballbreakers: The Guerrilla Girls’ Illustrated Guide to Female Stereotypes

Sara Ahmed
– The Promise of Happiness
I started to work on my project by doing active research, specifically with images from internet and social media. My working method was really connected with the doing. I have analysed images by confronting and deconstructing them. I needed to get used to them and their narratives to be able to understand and criticise them. I also needed to interpret visually what I was reading, making connection with theory and practice.

One work I have done was a presentation and a publication made for a school assessment. I have worked on the stereotypical representation of feminists. I have chosen to work mostly with online images, such as memes and published images. It was interesting to work with this material that is really direct, playing with humour, text and images to shut down feminist movements by stereotyping them. What interested me the most at that time was the ones playing with time, showing that it was better before by juxtaposition of images of the past and the present.
While I was reading and more closely defining my concept, I was getting more familiar with my subject. I started to understand trends, tools and from this stage I have focused my research on Internet and (pop)culture. I thought that social media, and online images are taking more and more places in our life and it was important to me to understand their impact. I have also chosen at that time to be focused on images stereotyping women.

To me it was really important that my research was based on what people are confronted by in an everyday life. I didn’t want to do something that was too academic either. I wanted to find ways to talk about difficult problematics with humour and in a direct way. I wanted to use codes of pop culture to deconstruct pop culture. What I mean by that is that I wanted to twist the codes to transform the initial message into a totally different one revealing power structures.

I have done a list of themes I wanted to look at and questions I was asking myself, to better understand how we are stereotyped as women. It is a list that I have used throughout my whole project, and I have tried to answer as many as possible of them.
4. Conceptualisation

Design fiction

From an early stage, I knew that I wanted to work in 3D and create an installation with different medium. As I wanted to investigate different thematic, it was the best way to do so. Using different medium was a way to better answer to each set of problematic and a better way to deliver a message. It was also a way for me to create different shorter works during these two years of research, a way to experiment with different techniques, and connect my own body with this work.

I also had in mind that this project would be in a context of Konstfack exhibition, so an installation was what I thought of as fitting the best within this frame.

While I was trying to have fun with the visual part, I tried to define my concept a bit more. I thought that these different mediums and objects should be linked by a narrative to speak all together in a chorus. I was thinking about how too often, people think that racist and sexist images belong to the past. I feel that most of the time, people are better at identifying the racist and sexist narrative belonging the images of the 60s than the one of today. Maybe because today’s narrative is not as blatant, and that people really think we are over sexist and racist representations while we are not.

So I started to ask myself if time can help us to analyse society today by putting a distance between us and the norms, making them visible. Is time a tool that can be used to criticise society and show the absurdity of the norms belongings to it?
From then, I started to use design fiction as a way to frame my project. I thought about a utopian world where inequalities and stereotypes were belonging to the past. By reading about utopias and futures, I had these questions coming to mind: *What if we are really living in a post-sexist and post-colonial world? How will we look at today’s society? What criticism could be made?*

I made the choice to work with a retro-futuristic approach and imagined a museum or in fact an exhibition where tools from the 2020s would be exhibited. This museum is 30 years from now, in 2050, when stereotypes of women no longer exist. By showcasing these actual objects, in a space in time suspension, I wanted to create a distance for the spectator. I wanted to make what we are familiar with, completely obsolete and even absurd. For me, it helped me to create, analyse and criticise in detail the society by imagining explaining to someone who has never lived in our current time.

The timeline of my exhibition was not too close, not too distance. A lot of things can happen in 30 years, but it is still a close future so I didn't have to reinvent everything. There is also a kind of nostalgia for the 30 years gap from today such as the 1990s and the 1960s. It is something that helps me think about trends we might keep or forget, by looking at how we romanticise these periods. I have also looked at how we portray the future, and the 2050s. How we picture visually futuristic installations. Which kind of design is used.
Title choice

At first, the title of my project was Femme: The museum of extinct stereotypes. I have chosen to use the word Femme, which is taken from the French language for several reasons.

I guess as a French woman, it is a word that is resonating with me because it is directly linked to the notion of « devenir une femme » or in English « becoming a woman ». It is a sentence that I have heard a lot while growing up, and all the notions around Femme, femininity and what is « être une femme ».

This word was used in an English context in the 1940s to define homosexual and bisexual women who were in appearance and behaviour seen as traditionally feminine. I have imagined that this word could grow more nuanced and with a broader range of meaning. Its new definitions could challenge how we are asked to define ourselves through gender and sexuality. What if we were not oppressed by labels and boxes, making place for more fluidity and changes? Making us more free to evolve and become someone with multiple indefinable identities?

What is interesting to me is also that this word in itself is also challenging the stereotyped expectation often placed on women. Choosing the term femme today is also about defiance. It is choosing femininity knowing that you are bound to face catcalls, sexism, invisibility, violence and suspicion. But also knowing that you deserve respect, to take up space, dress or act the way you want and demanding that others acknowledge this and act accordingly. Femme is political and it is about politicising femininity.
I have dropped the word « museum » from my title, as I thought it made more sense that it was a temporary exhibition inside a museum of remembrance. The scenography and installation were giving the feeling of the museum so I could just erase the word from the title.
I needed to be clearer on which kind of world my utopia was placed in and also frame the exhibition more. I decided to create a flyer that could have been an invitation to a vernissage for the exhibition. It was also a way to explore visually the idea of the retro-future.

I have chosen the moment of the vernissage to also reflect on power structures inside the institution such as a museum. An asterisk was explaining the practice of it and mocking it as if in this future it was no longer existing.

This work was also the starting point of a reflection about the museum and power structures inside such an institution. I started to think about where the museum could be placed, in which way it could be challenging. If it should embrace the norms of today or be completely different.
the modern history museum is happy to present its new exhibition: extinct stereotypes. it will be place in the femme area from the 24.10.2050 to 25.01.2051. we hope to see you for the vernissage* at 19h the 23.10.2050.

the femme area has been developed since 2040 by the modern history museum. after the femme revolution*2018-2040*, we had a duty never to forget that women have been oppressed, killed, tortured, invisibilized and more. we want to remember how demanding was the journey through what we call now, a neo-feminist, neo-decolonial world. we want to remember that before to be a common concept and a common word, femme was used as a political concept to politicize femininity. we want to never forget that the people who define themselves as femme took this choice to challenge femininity even knowing that they would have face catcalls, sexism, invisibility, violence and more.

femme as 10 years now. we want to bring you back 30 years from now in what was called a post-colonial, post-feminism society, to never forget that there is a need for us to maintain fighting and never step backward.

through a selection of images, objects and sound, you will be immerse in this time: — when the world was still run by white men and money — when only few governments where run by women and most of them played with inequalities and fears — when women were less payed than men — when ownership was a way to define yourself — when companies were commercializing not only the concept of femininity but also feminism movement — when feminism was seen either as not needed, either as an extreme movement, an aggressor of the freedom of expression — when walking in a street and being hit by sexist and/or racist images was a daily routine — when rape culture was polluting pop-culture.

*vernissage was a private gathering to inaugurate an exhibition the evening before the official opening.
In a utopian world based in 2050, the exhibition aims to show, explain and deconstruct how women were portrayed around 2020; how society and (pop)culture were deforming humans into stereotypical women. By showcasing the past and its conventions, the exhibition questions their normality and rationality. I use design fiction a way to explore and criticise our current time.

I have created a speculative scenario through different tools and artifacts. It helps me to show the ridicule of today’s norm-driven society which forces women to perform stereotypes through rituals.

I wanted to find a narrative that could connect the objects together. I had read two books that were materialising the questions posed by the narrative of the exhibition. One is Bitches, Bimbos and Ballbreakers: The Guerilla Girls’ Illustrated Guide to Female Stereotypes, it is a book which deconstructs different women stereotypes, as a catalogue but without going deep.

The other one, Post-Butt: The Power of the Image, by Melani De Luca, a book which focuses only on one female body part, the butt and it digs into the political meaning associated with the representation of it.

I was hesitant about going too deep into only one theme - as opposed to having several – before knowing what would become the frame of my project.
I have chosen to work with different thematic where each relates to a moment during the day. Since I wanted to investigate daily sexism, it was important to focus on daily life. Thought of as a never-ending routine mirroring the 2020s, it has no beginning and no end. It helped me to gather the questions and go further in my process and creation.

At first I had written eight thematics with a list of questions gathered under each. During the project, I gathered some of these questions under the different headings, and decided not to work with some others. I tried to pick thematics that were in dialogue with one another, but that also showed different aspects of oppression.
Final thematics of the exhibition:

- **MORNING**: makeup
- **WORK**: smile; emotional labour
- **EVENING**: culture
- **LUNCH**: feminist e-shoping
- **AFTERWORK**: fitness girls
My first thematic was MORNING – Makeup. My process was to read, look at videos and immerse myself in the thematic, write about it and work with images. One of my first works ended up not being part of my final project.

It was a long paper, representing an infinite do and don’t list. The rules were transcribed from popular makeup Youtube tutorials to highlight the numerous tasks we are expected to carry out and skills we are supposed to learn as women. It was showing the oppression of routines and the absurdity of these injunctions. It mimics the friendly and authoritarian tone of the makeup tutorial.

This paper was taking the shape of an infinite receipt. Screenshots of the videos were visualised as barcode. It was a critique of the billiard industry behind these tutorial videos.
I have worked with each thematic through the same process. Sometime the object was belonging to today, 2019 and I was transforming something already existing. Others were non-excitant but are dystopic representations of what is happening today and could happen in a close future. A sort of summing up of what is happening today. I had fun with playing with time, creating confusions.

On all the objects I have tried to avoid directly showing stereotypical images of female bodies on and in the objects. I was really afraid that showing stereotyped images would just be an extended reproduction of oppression. It was also really important to me not to blame the women, but more the structure, brands, economics that are using women's bodies and sexualised them.
So now I knew that I had to gather all this material in a room to connect them together. I had a lot of reflection about which kind of room I wanted. I question a lot also the notion of the white cube in a museum. Maybe in 30 years it will be completely gone and something really belonging to today’s society.
I wanted to create something that was close to our time and how we exhibit objects in a museum, but also in shops as my project is a lot about capitalisation of women’s oppression. I have played with some codes, as the white walls and neon lights colouring the rooms. It was interesting to have a dark room, first technically for the projections but also to create a space completely separate from the outside. I wanted to create this time in suspension, where the visitor can fully be in this new world. This neon, coloured light was to me reinforcing this retro-futuristic look.

It was really important to me to control the visitors’ emotions and the way they were walking in the room. I have created a small transitional space, where the visitor is directly confronted with the title of the museum and the date of the exhibition. The visitor is confronted with a text written from the future, explaining the exhibition and explaining how society was in the 2020s. To me, it was important that the visitor fully understand the idea of the future to understand the full work. It was also a way to put pause on the present time and bringing the visitors into another world, letting them believe fully in the narrative I created.
I have built the room with 6 walls, a hexagon, creating a circular navigation. This navigation was highlighting the never ending circle of daily oppression. Each wall separated with neon lights was about one thematic. The last one was having a manifesto text printed big. As the room was having different objects and thematic, it was important that the visitor was able to identify them in one glance. On each wall, the title of the thematic was printed, as well as a text written from the future explaining the thematic with a direct and distinct tone.

I also allowed people to play, interact and touch the objects as if they were in a shop. It was important to feel the different materials used and be able to read the object to make them feel real.
6. The project

Text d’introduction

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FEMME: extinct stereotypes

16-26.05.2050

This exhibition will bring you 30 years back in time – in the 2020s, just before the femnna-revolution.

At that time, conventions in society carried a binary view on gender. Humans were categorised from birth to death and expected to stay in their assigned norms. Fluidity was toned and erased. While all expressions of femininity faced severe consequences, invisibility, violence and even death.

Before becoming an everyday concept and established as a word, femnna was used as a tactic to claim femininity beyond binary principles. As people had to justify their sexuality and gender identification towards heterosexual logics and legislations based on biological factors, femnna attempted to subvert this order.

Through a selection of objects and artifacts, you will be immersed in the 2020s.

- When politicians addressed racist and sexist values.
- When the world was navigated by digital likes and money.
- When ownership was a way to define each other.
- When sticking to beauty standards was a key to success.
- When society failed to protect women and womanhood.
- When women had less leadership job opportunities.
- When women were less paid than men.
- When feminism was seen either as not needed, or as an extreme movement concerning women only.
- When the internet was a platform for hate speech.
- When rape culture was dominating (pop)culture.

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Femme is a word that is still in evolution. Derived from the French language, femnna was used in the 2020s to define homosexual and bisexual women who were not10applicable andまでの women who were traditionally feminine. Following the generation of this queer community, the word developed grown into a movement and with a broader range of meanings.
This exhibition will bring you 30 years back in time – in the 2020s, just before the *femme revolution*.

At that time, conventions in society carried a binary view on gender. Humans were categorised from birth to death and expected to stay in their assigned norms. Fluidity was denied and erased, while all expressions of femininity faced severe consequences, invisibility, violence and even death.

Before becoming an everyday concept and established as a word, *femme* was used as a tactic to claim femininity beyond binary principles. As people had to justify their sexuality and gender identification towards heteronormative logics and legislations based on biological factors, femmes attempted to subvert this order.

Through a selection of objects and artifacts, you will be immersed in the 20s:
- When politicians adjusted to racist and sexist values
- When the world was navigated by digital likes and money
- When ownership was a way to define each other
- When sticking to beauty standards was a key to success
- When society failed to protect women and womanhood
- When women had less leadership job opportunities
- When women were less paid than men
- When feminism was seen either as not needed, or as an extreme movement concerning women only
- When the internet was a platform for hate speech
- When rape culture was dominating (pop)culture

* femme is a word in a constant evolution. Taken from the French language, femme was used in the 1940s to define homosexual and bisexual women who were in appearance and behaviour seen as traditionally feminine. Following the liberation of the queer community, the word femme had grown into a more nuanced and with a broader range of meanings.
In 2020s, makeup was a billion-dollar industry and beauty a commodity. Makeup was especially targeting women, who had to follow quickly changing trends imposed by cosmetics companies. This industry spread ideas of success, a successful woman was the one who looked hyper-perfect at all occasions.

In teenage years, the transition between childhood and adulthood was heavily sexualised, and makeup played a key role in this transformation. Makeup tutorials on Youtube* could easily reach billions of views. This visibility encouraged companies to sponsor individuals for promoting their products in disguise, these individuals were called influencers. Makeup tutorials were the most frequently consumed videos by teenagers. By targeting them, the cosmetics industry was strategically creating everyday rituals for women from a very young age.

White skin was the norm and makeup companies were using pigments that rarely or never matched darker skin shades. To name light colours as "nude" or "neutral" exposed this hierarchy. At the same time brands showed images of pale, blond, young and skinny women on their products, promoting this ideal. Even if some brands slowly realised the commercial benefit of showing other bodies, this was an exception and didn’t always fit the supply of actual products.

Contouring became an important makeup technique, directly inspired from the black and white movie industry of the 1960s. Contouring was used to erase skin texture and to remodel eyes, lips and nose for the screen. This technique,
brought back into the 2010s, was so popular that women Instagram** pictures were all looking the same, homogenised by this makeup. “Selfie-ready” products were also pushing women to follow this digital trend.

No matter what choices women made, adopting makeup trends or not, they had to face loads of comments based on their external appearance alone.

* A website used for sharing videos online
** A phone application and social networking service used to share pictures and videos.
NEGOTIATING APPEARANCE, 2019
Engraved mirror 195x60 cm

It is a mirror engraved with a list of unspoken rules imposed on women by today’s society. Society characterised by selfies and constant admiration of body reflection. It speaks in the same authoritarian way as in the makeup tutorials. Here, you are able to read the rules only when you at the same time confront your own reflection. I am raising the question: Are we conscious that women are following all these rules?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rule</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Always WEAR foundation, otherwise you will look pale, tired and sick.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>If you are white, finding a foundation will be easy. If you ARE NOT, finding the right makeup for your skin will be a challenge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>If your skin is not white enough, APPLY skin whitening products even if they are dangerous, painful and expensive. DO NOT MIND the mercury poisoning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>The texture of your skin SHOULD NOT BE SEEN. You MUST BE flawless.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>COVER your dark circles. Your skin colour HAS TO BE consistent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>If you have wrinkles, even tiny ones, try to cover them as much as possible.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE INSTA FACE, 2024
Connected sheet mask 12cm x 12xm

I have imagined this artifact, as a product that could be created in a close future, 2024. Today, we have to be selfie-ready. Scrolling on the #makeup on Instagram is looking at similar pictures, homogenised by countering makeup technique. Filters are even reproducing makeup, makeup that is made specifically for the screen. Maybe the next step is to create a makeup that is reproducing Instagram filter. Today, women are even doing surgery to look like a filtered version of themselves. The insta face is working as a sheet mask reproducing the Instagram makeup. With a new technology, you just have to put the mask on your face, swap and choose different makeup according to your activity.
Boys and girls were raised differently. Girls were taught at an early age to be pleasant and careful, trained to carry the social responsibility to make other people feel comfortable. They especially learned to neither upset nor excite men, and if they failed they were taught to expect male violence, harassment or rape as a consequence. Knowing how to smile "just enough", at any occasion, was a lifelong lesson.

Since the end of the 19th century, images of women smiling were used in advertising to sell everything, from domestic products to cars. Submissive, docile and happy, the female smile commonly became a selling argument. By the 2020s, it had developed into an embedded social requirement for girls and women.

Companies used happiness as a way to better control their employees. Launching group activities, tracking devices and other methods to promote positivity, was a strategy to make people feel emotionally connected to work and create interdependence. Happiness was an important key to make employees spend more time at work, while making them more docile. Eventually the companies would enjoy a better profit.

To perform the perfect smile was advanced knowledge that could decide a woman's life — her relationships and working career. Women in power positions who didn't smile enough, were regarded as authoritarian, unpleasant and emasculated, thus not suitable and elegant enough for this position. If smiling too much, they were instead seen as trivial and possibly stupid, thus not trustworthy as leaders. A woman who didn't know how to balance her smile was
who didn’t know how to balance her smile was less likely to pass a job interview than her male equivalent, no matter the position. However, women of colour had to smile more than white women since they also had to compensate for stereotypes of the “angry black woman”, rooted in a history of racism and slavery.

Women were asked to perform this smile not only at work but all the time. Expected to regulate human interactions of any kind; to promote cheerfulness or compensate a bad atmosphere. A woman who refused to smile in public was regarded as socially difficult and had to face ready-made speculations and comment on her femininity, sexuality and so on.

Strangers could feel entitled to ask them to smile, to look nicer and prettier. Often, these commentaries were attempting to seduce and if a woman was not reacting, it was considered as a provocation. Therefore, a lot of women would answer politely to avoid an escalation of these comments.
SMILE TRACKER, 2022
Computer App

I have created an animation, showing the screen of someone working. On the screen, you can see the app “smile tracking” which is tracking the smile of the person during its working day. Every time the person is not smiling, the computer freezes and a bubble appears with a clock showing how long the person didn’t smile. Asking the person to always smile, more and more, it becomes more and more oppressive through the video.
Feminist movements were extremely stereotyped. Either ignored or deemed too radical and propagating hate towards men. Anti-feminist campaigns were spreading false information, mocking, harassing, trolling, doxxing and threatening members of feminist organisations, often these campaigns were orchestrated online. One political movement in particular (alt-right) was disseminating sensitive and personal information as well as promoting rape and physical violence against women.

This type of harassment became an everyday matter for women, leading them to practise auto-censorship. Almost no legal frame was designed to protect the victims of online harassment campaigns. Least protected were women of colour since anti-feminist movements were especially virulent towards anyone that "threatened the white identity".

At the same time, feminism was celebrated by the fashion industry who spotted an opportunity to profit from female engagements. While they started to show more diversity of female bodies and created a feminist narrative, they had more visibility and sells.

Feminist prints started to appear on mass-produced garments, creating an illusion of progress while the companies ignored to deal with their responsibility for producing inequalities.

International non-profit organisations were reporting devastating conditions for workers within the production industry.
Apart from a change of marketing strategies, the industry failed to take action. In 2019 not a single worker was making a living wage.* From underpaid to physical violence, the range of oppression and abuse, especially towards women, was deeply installed.

* Extract from: Not a single worker is making a living wage, yet H&M claims to have done an amazing job – published 03.04.2019 by Clean Clothes Campaign
H&M GROUP, 2018-19
T-shirts, socks and hats

Today, brands are recuperating feminist narrative to increase their sell. On garments, objects, advertising campaigns and so on. I have focused this work on the H&M GROUP but it is only one example among a lot of companies.

I have hijacked some of their garments with a feminist message, by printing a gender-based violence report made about their factories. I have tried to link sentences from the H&M communication, to sentences taken from these reports.
Looking fit and healthy was a trend, a sign of human success. Amongst the most frequently followed Instagram* accounts, were those run by self-proclaimed fitness coaches**. People, and especially female users, were targeted and exposed to a never-ending flow of this imagery and advisory voices. Videos and photos were promoting the “perfect body”; pale and hairless, with a large breast, a thin waist and most of all, big buttocks.

Initially, the focus on big buttocks was a political and emancipatory statement, mainly created by women users themselves — a reaction against the dominating image of the 90s ideal woman as skinny from top to toe. Conveyed through pop culture superstars, the big butt became the focal point of the 20s women pictures, diluting its original message and creating a new norm.

Over-exercising was glorified. Fitness images together with an increasing number of smart devices and tracking apps encouraging people to “eat better”, “sleep better” and “exercise better”, eventually created obsessive behaviours such as eating disorders and body dysmorphic disorders. Ironically, this fabricated imagery of the fit body often claimed “body positivism”, exposing a disconnection between the written and the visual language.

Progress photos (an artificial juxtaposition of ”before” and ”after” photos) were allover Instagram*, imposing a narrative of bodily quick fixes as super easy and a matter of commitment alone. This category of images mainly focused on women’s bodies and female weight loss, while not taking
into account women’s health. The vast majority of progress images were published by influencers to sell training and eating programs.

Fitness images were mainly shot by professional photographers, and heavily photoshopped. Women models were asked to pose in twisted positions to reshape their bodies, at average they trained 2—3 hours a day and undergoing surgery was sometimes part of this reality.

In the 2020s, companies were controlling social media, pushing the blurry lines of advertising and dividing the people in two categories: influencers VS buyers. People were navigating from clearly label sponsored ads to hidden ones. Fitness pictures were meant to highlight logos and products. They were creating an endless stream of homogenised fitness images – from behind–, mainly showing body parts rather than the practice of the sport itself.

Brands, by hijacking butt selfies, were perpetuating and capitalising on female beauty, using women as sexual objects and advertising boards.

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* A photo and video-sharing app – one of the second most used platforms at that time
** The 10 most followed fitness coaches had from 4 million to 12 million followers in April 2019
*** Buttock-surgery trend had its boom in 2014, in US, the average was one every 30 min.
Today Instagram fitness pictures are all over Instagram. I have created a fake app with a fake connected mat called « 90 Days Butt challenge ». Projected on a squared mirror, the app is a critique of the capitalisation and sexualisation of women’s bodies, focused on the butt.
In the 2020s, women were growing up surrounded by messages that they had to be cautious, especially when it was dark outside. No matter where danger came from, women were the ones carrying the guilt of this violence. From people blaming them for being alone at night to pointing at the way they were dressed, women were shamed for being the victims of assaults. The legal focus was to find out what women did to prevent and counteract this crime. Rape victims, especially, went into self-reflection and shame instead of reporting the perpetrator.

(Pop)culture was a significant part of cultivating gender stereotypes. Men were expected to be strong, chasing and saving women. Women were expected to be desirable, available and willing to be saved. By showing what was or wasn’t acceptable at that time, this narrative defined the way the society looked at gender roles. While certain personal traits would be perceived as positive by others in case you were male, the same traits would have negative connotations in case you were female. And the other way around.

Literature and film would reinforce this bold narrative on gender. Male characters who showed sensitive traits, asking for consent or exposing vulnerability, were often pictured as insecure and unattractive. Novels and movies where female characters were humiliated, abused or brutally murdered were often celebrated as classics or cult. These repeated linear representations of gender propagated a belief that men should be in position of power, superior to women or just more human. Culture was polluted by rape culture.
Sexual violence was in all the layers of society, from work to one's intimate circle. In the 2020s, the “metoo movement”* came to highlight sexual abuses in the cultural sphere, its magnitude and systematic existence. It quickly spread worldwide, denouncing power structures while echoing testimonies of the victims. Before this movement, only one aspect was openly denounced, the violence in gloomy streets, spreading rape myths and invisibilising other violence.

Companies selling self-defence products were capitalising on female fear. Although targeting women, most products were not designed for women’s bodies. Handles were often over-dimensioned and buttons supposed to activate alarms were visually and tactually hard to find, especially in stressful situations. The design of these products was mainly users oriented in the sense that it was concerned with aesthetic languages historically connected to femininity, exposing a priority of marketing and selling rather than creating usefulness. Many products were instead demanding; learning fighting technique, wearing "safety shorts" or introducing "rape safe" condoms. Again, they showed how women were left alone with the responsibility of taking care of their own safety.

* Me Too was a movement against sexual harassment and sexual assault which began in October 2017 with the sexual-abuse allegations against Harvey Weinstein. It attempted to demonstrate the widespread prevalence of sexual assault and harassment, especially in the workplace.
SAFETY TOOLS, 2019
Key chain cat, alarm, book, DVD, drug tests, kubaton, in plexiglass display

I have displayed in plexiglass boxes tools used as « self-defence » targeted for women. To me seeing them all together it is already showing the problem of violence towards women in our current society. In addition, most of these tools are not handy, and some are really problematic when it comes to putting the burden of guilt on women. I have displayed them in plexiglass neon boxes to make a direct link with the materials and colours used in clubs, bars, etc.
This is a museum of remembrance.

We have to remember...
...that the people who define themselves as femme made the bold choice to challenge femininity, despite knowing that they would face catcalls, harassments, invisibility and violence.

We also have to remember...
...that humans (women?) who decided not to embrace femininity norms faced the same consequences. The box was narrow, the lines were blurry and the rules were unspoken.

We need to remember...
...that humans associated with female gender were stuck in a circle of oppression. They were asked to be women, asked to shape their look through rituals, asked to control their emotions, asked to be a commercialised object of desire, asked to reproduced and fulfill a single image, and moreover, asked to take care of the consequences of these stereotypes.

We also need to remember...
...that men who identified themselves with the female gender, were asked to become women, or they were asked to stick to masculinity; to be strong and brave, to be rational thinkers and sexually active or aggressive.

We should never forget...
...how demanding the journey into human liberation has been.
It is our duty to never forget... 
...that there is a need for us to keep on fighting and never return to what we get rid of. If we rest, patriarchy will soon speak back through all of us.
For the final examination I had a discussion with Brita Lindvall Leitman. She wrote a text about her emotions and how she navigated from feeling free and trapped at the same time. It was really touching and interesting to hear.

Brita talked about how she felt trapped in her own 2019 body while looking at the absurdity and violence of the past. She even mentioned feeling afraid of leaving the room and be back to the 2020s while being in this utopia where these oppressions are belonging to the past.

Emotions have been one of the main things I had to control in this installation by the narrative, the scenography. I was showing society as it is today, so the twist of looking at the present from the perspective of the future was a tool to create emotions in relation to our daily lives. It was a tool to reveal oppression, micro aggression and show the absurdity of today’s society. During these 10 days of exhibition at Konstfack, it was important to have discussion with people and look at their reaction. Sometime emotional, touched, sometime mad, it was really interesting to see how it was triggering emotions in people and raising questions.

Brita reacted well to the use of the future and the norm preserving elements such as the objects, and the exhibition format. She had seen it as a tool to reveal how we have internalised and come to accept the absurd. She said that I have created a non-linear storytelling that tells us a story from within, with our own experience as a voice over.
She described the exhibition as executed in a complex and brutally direct way, constructed as a timeline. She continued by saying that each stop, deals with a different angle of oppression, each stop plays with the real VS fiction, both visually and with the experience itself - the time.

She also understood that with this work, I wanted to give hope. Showing the urgency to act for a less oppressive society, this project is giving hope than one day all of that will belong to the past.

She finished her reading text with this sentence « I want to stay here, so I can live - and step outside, and walk the streets of that specific future. »