

About the project

Full name: Hektor Leon Dierzuk

Proposed name of the project: Kataphraktos

5 Keywords:

- armour
- obscurity
- transformation
- symbolism
- transience

Summary of the project:

For *Kataphraktos* I will produce a series of photographic prints exploring the visibility of transgender people and their right to privacy. Conceptualised as a reaction to the increase in popularity of anti-trans rhetoric, and the subsequent threat of violence, my aims are to produce modern elements of armour incorporating medical equipment used in my own medical transition. By employing religious visual themes my work will act as an allegory of belonging and rejection, and will urge the viewer to consider the emotional and moral implications of systemic surveillance of transgender people.

Detailed description of the project:

Kataphraktos is a deeply personal project, originating as a reaction to the magnitude of anti-trans violence that has become normalised in the British media. I have personally faced systemic invasions of privacy in many every-day situations, often feeling vulnerable and exposed with no real means of defending myself. The need for protection inspired the usage of chainmail in the project and its name - from Greek “kataphraktos” means “covered” and is used to describe cataphrakts, who were medieval

armoured heavy cavalry. Through this project I aim to negotiate my own visibility free from invasion, and foster the feeling of safety and confidence in my identity. Through an extended and intimate allegory of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, I wish to invite the viewer to see gender transition through a spiritual lens and consider the impacts of socio-political life on transgender people's psyche.

For this project, I will produce a chainmail coif and a crown of thorns, partially out of used needles used in hormone replacement therapy, combining man-made armour with the half-organic, half-artificial material of the crown. I chose Caswell Bay beach during low tide as the photography set, further alluding to the theme of transition, whether bodily or environmental. Kataphraktos will be presented as a series of photographic prints on a vinyl medium to accentuate the connection to transience.

Timeline:

Start date	End date	Details
Aug 2024	Aug 2024	Brain storms - searching for areas of interest.
Sept 2024	Sept 2024	Defining and clarifying ideas. Further reading, gathering visual references
Oct 2024	Oct 2024	Defining objectives and timelines. Preliminary research on methods of production, watching tutorials.
Oct 2024	Oct 2024	Ordering tools. First project sketches.
Nov 2024		Liasing with the metalwork department.
		Experimentation in the metalwork studio.
	Nov 2024	Decision on material and themes.

Start date	End date	Details
Dec 2024		Further technique practice - crown.
	Dec 2024	Decision to utilise the chainmailing technique.

Jan 2025		Decision to combine organic and solder - crown.
	Jan 2025	Chainmail sketch and calculating materials required.
Feb 2025		Complete wooden element of crown. 1wk dry time.
		Complete the crown portion of chainmail. Restock window. Troubleshooting the connecting technique.
	Feb 2025	Late Feb - incorporate metal crown components.
Mar 2025		Complete face chainmail component.
		Complete back and shoulder of the chainmail.
		Troubleshooting needle attachment - crown.
	Mar 2025	Trips to location and confirming preferences. Initial photoshoot for supporting publication project.
Apr 2025	Apr 2025	Troubleshooting before Easter and finishing touches.
May 2025		Final photoshoot on location.

	5-9May 2025	Exhibition preparation, editing, printing, mounting.
DEADLINE	16 May 2025	Exhibition opening.

Budget:

Description	Cost
Soldering tools - iron, solder, flux, copper tape, pliers, etc	£65
PPE equipment - gloves, heatproof mat, mask, goggles	£60
Chainmail rings - 5 packets of 2000 rings each estimated need	£50
Photoshop and Lightroom subscription (annual, no student discount)	£240
Camera hire - Olympus EM Mark II, 7 day (quote from lenslab.co.uk)	£134
Lens hire - Olympus 12-40mm f2.8, 7 day (quote from lenslab.co.uk)	£60
Tripod hire, 7 days (quote from lenslab.co.uk)	£12
Wireless remote/trigger hire, 7 days - Godox (quote from lenslab.co.uk)	£42
External light hire, 7 days - Metz Olympus flash (quote from lenslab.co.uk)	£17
Printing - vinyl, service and delivery, 5 prints (quote frombigartbanners.com)	£98
TOTAL COST	£778

Develepmental opportunities

During the initial practice phase of this project I reached out to the University's metalwork departament where I conducted the initial samples. I experimented with needle and wire sizes for the best visual outcome, and have ultimately decided to use natural thorns alongside metal ones to establish the connection to the themes of transition, change and defense. Seeking guidance in fashion and jewelry, I experimented with texture to create outcomes bordering on unsettling.

I researched the history of chainmail and methods of production before choosing a design that would be efficient in production and honouring the craft. I analysed cataphrakt armour to understand key ideas on its utility. This helped me make decisions around the shape and form of the coif, and chose for it to cover my face as a strong symbol of privacy and obscurity.

Considering my themes and areas of interest, I made a plan to experiment with overexposed flash photography by shooting with a camera that could have an external flash attached. The publication project allowed me to practice Photoshop editing in preparation for the final photoshoot. I have learnt how to reproduce the desired effects digitally to ensure coherence across the project.

Main risks, challenges & management

The main health and safety risk associated with this project was the usage of needles. Exhibiting the chainmail and crown in the exhibition would prove unsafe if left without protection. I considered preserving the physical objects in resin, however this was ruled out due to the adverse health impacts. Displaying on a plinth would be costly as a special glass dome would have to be ordered. I will therefore seek safer methods of representing the objects through printing materials instead of literal representation - the impermanence of vinyl printing for example seems to tie in better to the themes used.

Practice based experiments

Conception

The intention to create physical pieces of wearable armour was influenced by anti-trans rhetoric which has become increasingly more popular in the UK in recent years. Invasion of privacy started affecting my everyday life routinely, making me feel helpless and isolated, with no means of defense. The idea for the usage of medical waste came from my struggle for medical help and assistance around obtaining and administering HRT, and a lack of safe and quick disposal of the equipment such as needles and syringes. This has led to an accumulation of needles overtime, which I collected in a glass jar, ready to be transferred to a sharps box once the amount becomes sufficient. I wanted to utilise this waste somehow to give it new meaning.

The intrusion into my private life I experienced by just being a visible (perhaps even against my will) trans person led me to avoiding contact and confrontation. I became hyperaware of my face, which was quickly changing due to HRT. My withdrawal from large areas of public life posed a question - can I exist publicly without surrendering my privacy? I wanted to create self-portraiture that would obscure my face without forcing me into hiding or pretending.

This project is largely a reaction to a sociopolitical reality which attacks and dehumanises transgender people baselessly. The impact of politics on this project is a big one, and finding emotional balance and safety among this chaos as an individual has proven challenging. I wanted to represent myself through politically conscious art, and create meaning through nuance, symbolism and obscurity.

Initial research

Images on medical equipment websites where needles are arranged according to size brought about a mental connection to the image of a halo of rays, in particular the halo of Our Lady at the Gate of Dawn in Lithuania, and Our Lady of Sorrows in Golgotha, Jerusalem. The Lithuanian representation of Holy Mary is very prevalent in Polish culture since the historical Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569 to 1795), referenced in the national epic poem *Sir Thaddeus, or the Last Foray in Lithuania: A Nobility's Tale of the Years 1811–1812, in Twelve Books of Verse* by Adam Mickiewicz, published in 1834.





Our Lady at the Gate of Dawn, Lithuania, 17th century



Our Lady of Sorrows statue in Golgotha, Jerusalem

The Biblical iconography of Holy Mary led to researching other Biblical figures, particularly The Man of Sorrows. Wearing a Crown of Thorns as one of the Instruments of Passion (Arma Christi) links to the imagery of needles - thin, reflective metal, in iconography gilded with gold or silver. Religious figures were often portrayed wearing a “double halo” - a plain circular one, and one made of sun rays or stars. I was inspired by the Renaissance portrayal of Man of Sorrows by two artists - Francke and von Leyden. In the case of Francke, the Crown of Thorns appears almost metallic - giving me the idea to arrange my needles as thorns and solder them into a metal Crown of Thorns. I decided to keep an organic element by harvesting real thorn branches and using them in the making of the crown.



Meister Francke: *Man of sorrows, with angels*, c. 1430



Lucas van Leyden, *Man of Sorrows*, 1573

My research led me further to investigate soldering as this is something I haven't done before. I was however aware of soft solder jewelry, and have seen a spiky variation, resembling thorns. In this sense, the thorns could both have a defensive/offensive symbolism and a fashion utility - Shaun Leane's Crown of Thorns for Alexander McQueen Autumn/Winter 1996 Collection.



@tearsanddears on instagram



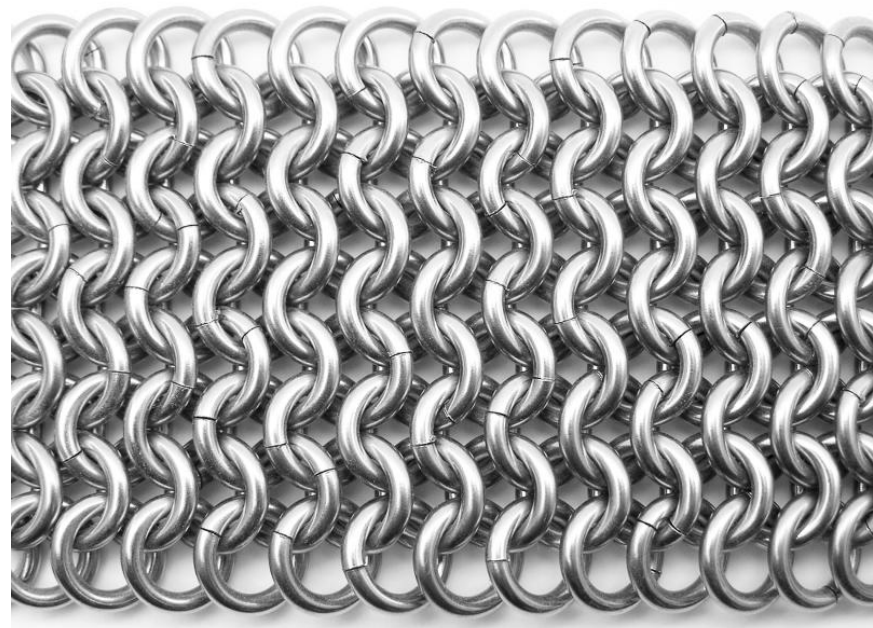
unknown



Shaun Leane for Alexander McQueen, Autumn/Winter 1996. Silver.

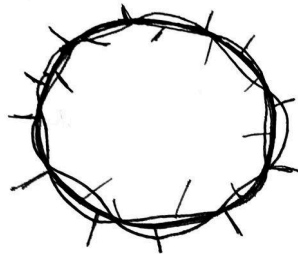
I explored historical ways of face covering - as protection against the elements, religious practice, and a defensive practice used in historical warfare, including the metal helmets. Since ancient times, chainmail has existed as an added element of protection for soldiers - in Europe, the most well-known style being the European 4-in-1 mail. The practice of wearing chainmail to battle is ancient, and only the richest armies could afford to produce enough for a squad. In ancient Persia, a heavy cavalry called cathaphrakts dressed in chainmail and scale armour from head to toe including the face, and left only small holes for the eyes.

The origin of the modern word cataphrakt comes from Greek “kataphraktos”, with “kata” as preposition, and “phraktos” meaning “covered”. I also looked into the etymology of the word chainmail, and found that some sources believe it comes from the Latin word “macula” meaning “spot” or “opacity” - linking directly to one of the theories I discuss in my dissertation, which is Glissant’s theory of opacity - the right to be unknown and illegible as a political statement against discrimination of minorities. This established a strong connection between my personal desire to obscure my face as both a defense and a statement, and the history of the cataphrakts. “Kataphraktos” also became the title of the project and the first layer in constructing the symbolism.



crown

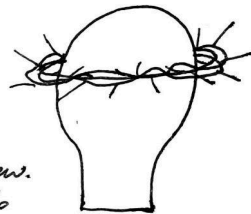
3 branches — 2 organic, 1 metal (solder + needles)



aerial view.

↳ thorns facing out + inwards
(if needles then blunt)

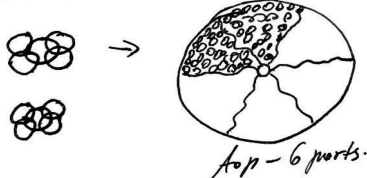
↳ base of the metal band
rose thorns / stems (thin thorns)



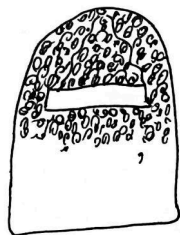
side view.
authentic to
Arme Christi.

Chainmail

EU 4 in 1



~ 2000 pieces.
whole estimated 10K?



↳ "beadwork" style covering
as seen in historical reconstructions
↳ obscurity, privacy.
↳ Khoulator long.

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Arme Christi —
• crown
• sun + moon (eclipse)
• cross
• etc.

Crown of Thorns

use of exposed
needles

risk of poking/
stabbing injury

needles not exposed
fully but "encased"
in solder?

metal solder

Shaun Leone
for A. McQueen
runway jewellery

Statement
pieces = fashion
statements
= political
statements?

natural elements

natural form
of thorns.

metal + wood
duality

↳ in 1 European near
3 BC origins

Chainmail

Persian,
fully covered

cataphracts
armoured heavy
cavalry

etymology in
Greek cataphractus
"covered, protected"

mail
Latin
"macula"
meaning
"spot"
"opacity"

obscuring
the face

Glissant
"Poetics of relation"
Opacity theory.

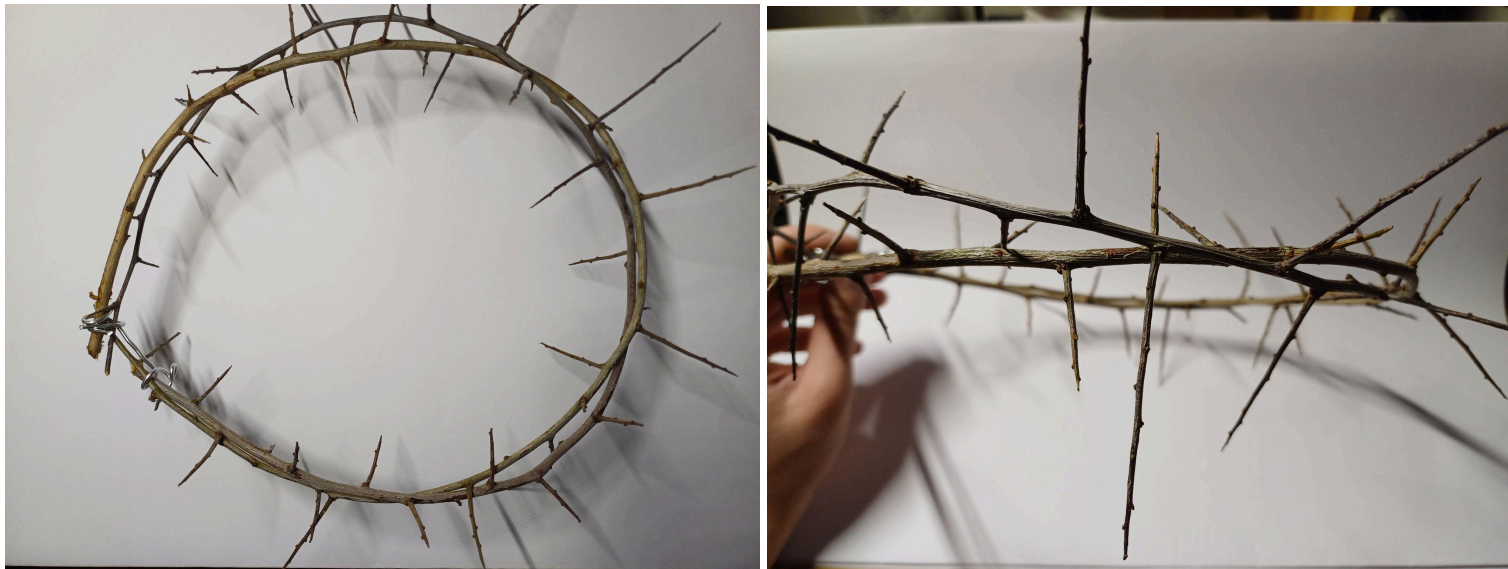
armour piece

impenetrable

privacy

First steps - crown and chainmail

Thorns harvested, soaked in water for elasticity, and bent to shape. Minimum 2 days to dry, preferably longer due to lack of specialist drying equipment and outside temperatures below 20C/high humidity..

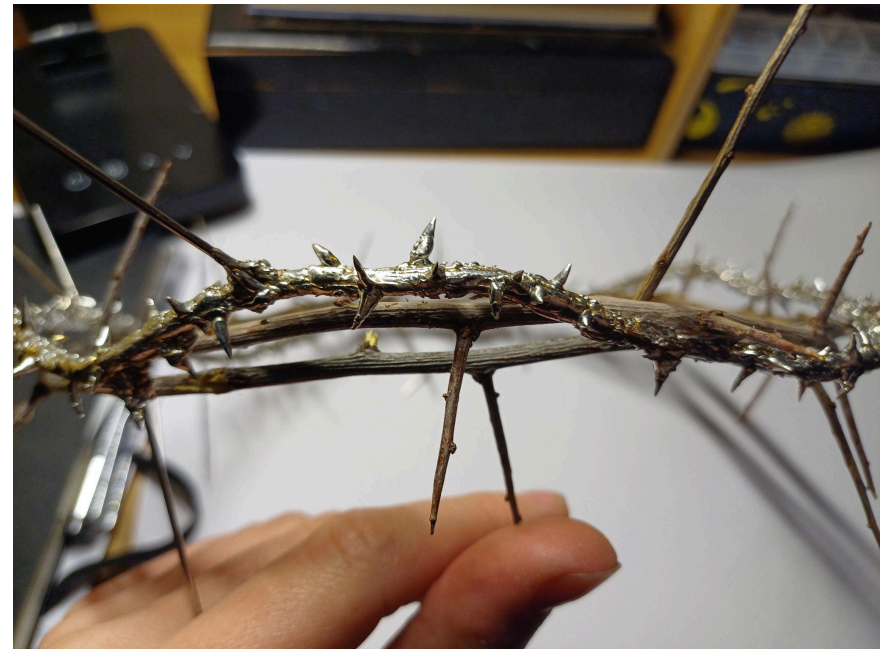


I wanted to replicate the natural way in which the thorns grow, however this wouldn't be possible with using sharps as I could be putting myself at risk. Therefore needles are exclusively facing outwards, and smaller thorns facing inwards.

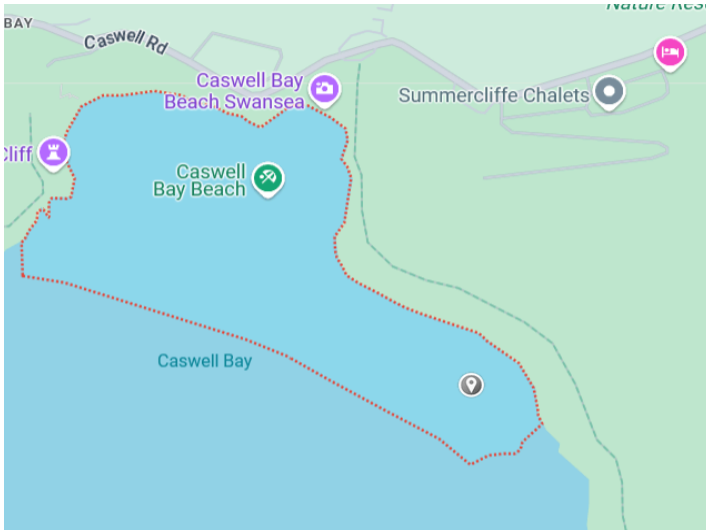
I also encountered some difficulties with the soldering process, as the stainless steel needles would not easily stick to solder. I experimented with wrapping the needles in copper tape and partially encasing them in solder for added sturdiness.



Work in progress crown and chainmail.



Publication project (as part of a group) and experimentation:

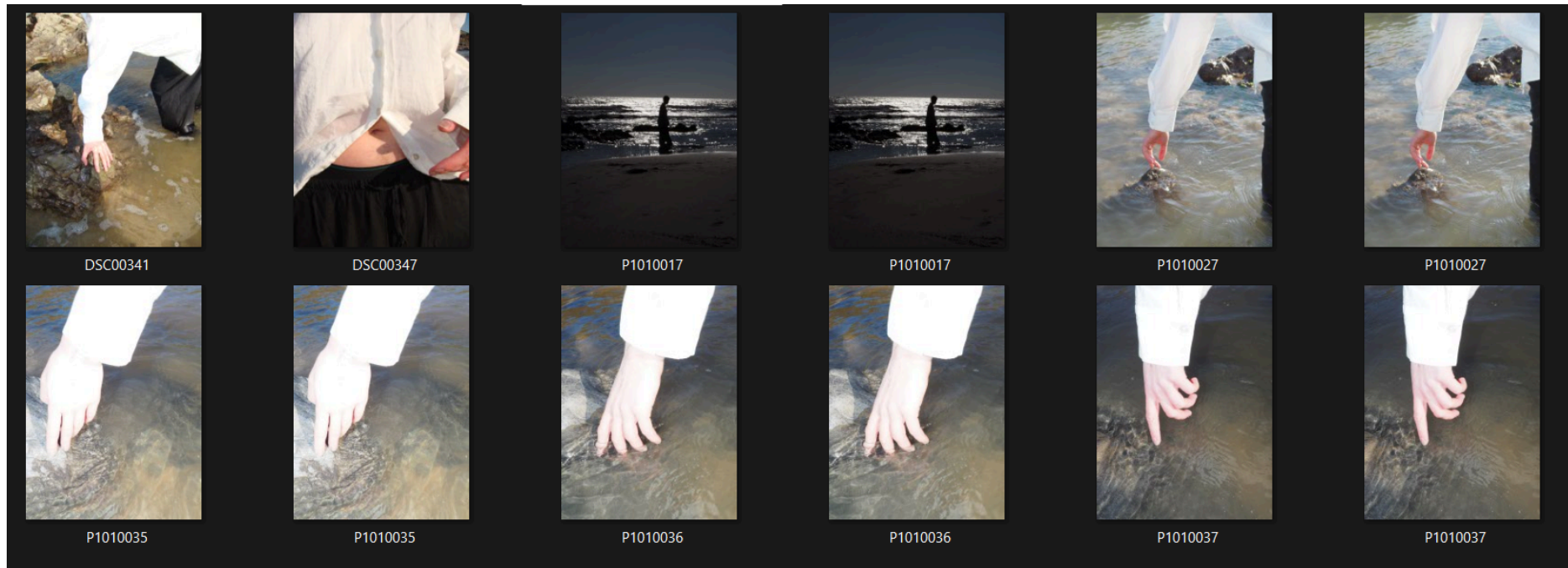


Hi/Lo	Time	Height
Low	00:33	0.31m
High	07:48	10.17m
Low	13:54	0.13m
High	20:07	10.06m

I chose Caswell Bay for the location of the photoshoot due to my familiarity with the area. I consulted the tide time calendar to ensure the tide would be low enough to walk on the beach.

Quickly changing environment - need to be mindful of the rapid rise of water (health and safety).

Initial contact sheets from Caswell Bay, Swansea at low tide (.JPG and .ORF format)



I felt particularly inspired by the overexposed white of the images on the bottom row.

Steph Verschuren - visual reference to the overexposed white figure, gleaming with light. Consulted the artist - the effect can be created with a built-in flash if an external one is unavailable. This would work in my favour as the beach environment is unpredictable and tides rise quickly - minimal and light equipment is key. The flash used here is a built-in Olympus flash, meaning I was able to reduce the amount of equipment necessary for the shoot.



Steph Verschuren (2023) @stephverschuren on instagram

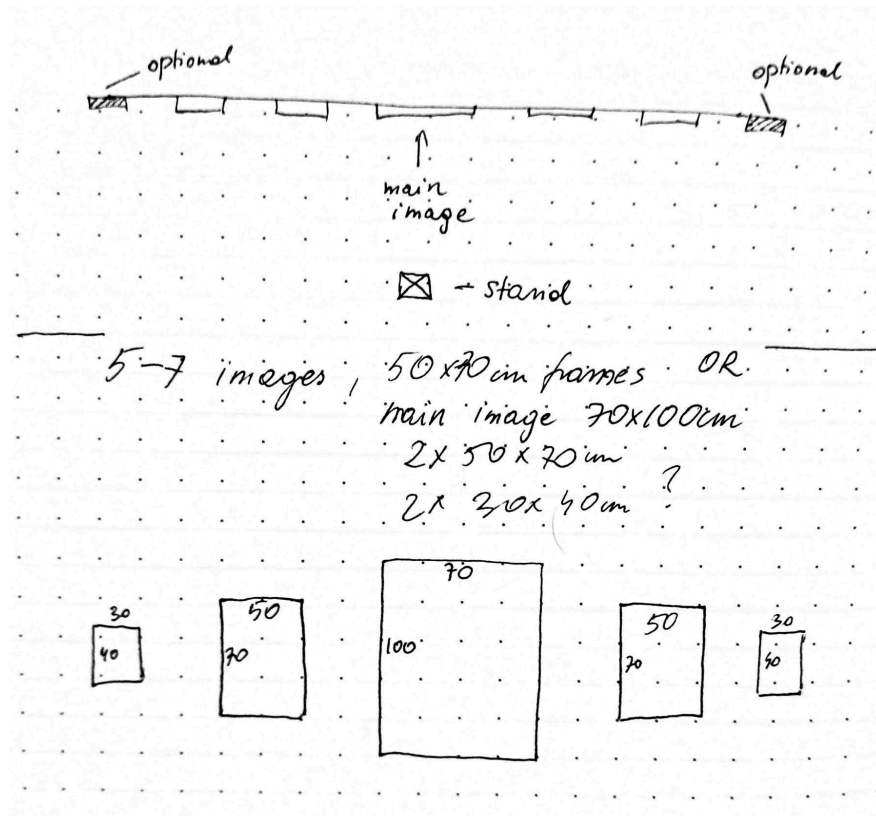
The visual theme links back to the mind map - Arma Christi (eclipse theme), the play of light can be associated with the biblical aureole, which sometimes surrounds the entire body of saints. Linking to the theory of opacity - this visual theme obviously plays very well into the right to be unknown that Glissant proposes in his *Poetics of Relation* - taking away identifiable characteristics which stereotypically are important in a portrait does not mean that the subject becomes invisible - the way of perception changes and forces the viewer to rethink what is important in representation and how we perceive other people.

Final images edited in preparation for the zine print.



I learned how to create the glowing silhouette effect in Photoshop (inside1, posterimage) and have developed my own visual signature that I have carried forward to the development of *Kataphraktos*. Producing images for the physical publication was a helpful exercise to better my Photoshop skills, as well as understand how contrast shows up on physical prints such as RISO, which the publication would utilise.

Installation - from concept to final decision



Installation map (left), resin concept for the crown (right)

I wanted to expand on my previous practice of working within triptychs, to show a larger scope of work and to produce a narrative through my images.

Initially, I wanted to produce 5-7 images, with the biggest (B0, roughly 100x141cm) in the middle and smaller ones on either side (from B1 70x100cm, down to B2 50x70cm, B3 35x50cm etc....), MDF mounted. This would however draw attention to the biggest image in the middle and therefore not be very helpful to create a visual narrative that is easy to understand and follow. I also wanted to include the chainmail and crown as physical objects in my exhibition. The MDF would also mean that the physical prints are theoretically “set” into reality, which goes against the theme of liminality and transience.

Crown and chainmail would have been shown on a mannequin head on a plinth. This however posed a health and safety risk, as the objects would have to be secured on properly and I would need enhanced PPE due to the risk of stabbing (needles on the crown). A glass dome would resolve this, however it's very costly to have one made to the right size. Another way of safely exhibiting the works would be to preserve them in resin, but it's a large health and safety risk if done at home, and requires specialist tools and a very well ventilated place to keep the work as the resin sets. I decided against this as my interaction with the objects is more important to me personally than them being displayed to the public - the theory behind my practice is privacy and opacity, and I did not want to make a spectacle out of the objects that were created for personal protection.

I also considered a number easily divided by 3 for the amount of prints. 6 prints for example would mean an extended narrative past a triptych (could even be divided into a double triptych and installed in a bigger space). If the prints were even in size, I could produce a linear visual narrative, or be completely flexible in meaning. I decided to choose options with the biggest flexibility, therefore also considering vinyl as a printing medium due to its single use, transient nature.