catalog

force of subtleness

Auguste Soesastro

a multimedia fashion exhibition
15th Aug – 10th Sep
The Warehouse
Plaza Indonesia, Level 5

Plaza INDONESIA
IT'S WHERE I WANT TO BE

KRATON
AUGUSTE SOESASTRO

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Curator
Sadiah Boonstra

Architect
studiodasar

Graphic Designer
Noone

Videographer
Reuben Tourino

This is the first large scale solo exhibition dedicated to the works of fashion designer Auguste Soesastro, celebrating the first 15 years of his career.
His quiet manner of working has kept him under the radar with a cult following of extremely discreet clients. Soesastro is indisputably one of the most important fashion designers from the region, known for his no fuss - architect's precision - minimalist interpretations of Indonesian inspired designs.

This exhibition features fashion works from the first debut in New York 2009 to the present. Also artworks that are in relation to the practices of dressmaking and pushing the limits of pattern making are on show. Included in this exhibit is a video recording of his latest project Architecture of Cloth 2: Singularity with live performances each weekend.

Three separate yet related sections of the exhibition feature the themes of *Njawani*, *Architecture* and *Minimalism*, all rooted in stories of his family history and personal life journey of identity struggles, migration and cultural assimilation. "*Dayaningbudi*" or "*force of subtleness*", embodies the quiet battle to disrupt social conventions and break down stereotypes of racial identity and class.

Sadiah Boonstra
Curator

Before the 17th century, Auguste's male ancestors arrived in Java as settlers from Southern China. Many of them married local women. Their offspring, also known as Peranakans, later intermarried with other settler communities including those of Arabic descent.

In the 1700s, during the Dutch occupation of the Indonesian archipelago, his ancestors grew to prominence and were bestowed land titles and positions (Majoor der Chinezen) in their respective cities by the Dutch East India Company. Their offsprings subsequently attended Dutch schools (Europeesche Lagere School, ELS; Meer Uitgebreid Lager Onderwijs, MULO; and Hogere Burgerschool, HBS). While Javanese was spoken at home, they spoke Dutch at school and in formal interactions. Although most of them, through patrilineal descent, still held Chinese names, Chinese has not been spoken in the family in the last 300 years. As with Peranakans throughout the Indonesian archipelago, they represent ethnic integration and intermingling across generations.

In Java, the embracing of Javanism is known as NJAWANI, a term synonymous with Peranakans who have adopted the customs, lifestyle and philosophy of the Javanese.

Amongst the many contributions of the Peranakans in Java, Batik is perhaps the most outstanding. Both Auguste's great grandmothers were well known Batik entrepreneurs; his mother's maternal great grandmother hailed from Pekalongan (Central Java) and his father's paternal family from Sidoarjo (East Java). Before Indonesia declared its independence in 1945, Batik entrepreneurs in Java were indeed mostly Peranakan women who employed female workers to do wax drawing on cloth. These businesses reached their peak in the 1920s and 1930s, allowing successful business owners to send their children abroad to study. This privilege, however, was short-lived and ended shortly after the Japanese invasion, resulting in the total destruction of Auguste's matrilineal great grandmother's workshop in 1941. This forced the family to flee to other cities and eventually to the Netherlands, where until today most of his relatives have been naturalised and properly integrated. On his father's side, besides the Batik workshop—which closed down right after Independence—the family ran a successful printing business since the turn of the century, which allowed his father and his siblings to be educated in Europe. After a period of decline, the printing company eventually closed down in the wake of the large civil unrest of 1965-1966; along with other relatives, Auguste's father's family left Indonesia and settled
in the Netherlands.

The batik works of Auguste's great grandmothers and great-great grandmother—Mrs. Gan Kay Bian and Mrs. Tan Pang Soen of Pekalongan, and Mrs. Tan Sin Ing of Sidoarjo respectively—are to be found among the international collections of prestigious museums in the Netherlands including the Tropenmuseum.

Auguste's father, Hadi Soesastro, was a prominent economist. Educated in West Germany, he was not just actively involved in but also served as the Head of the Indonesian Student Organization (Persatuan Pelajar Indonesia, PPI Jerman Barat). He eventually returned to Indonesia in the early 1970s for the love of country. It was this—and his passion for culture and the arts—that he passed on to his son from a young age. His father would often take young Auguste to the theatre, classical recitals, opera, museums and also auctions.

At the age of eleven after living in the Netherlands and United States, Auguste returned to Indonesia to finish the last year of elementary school. These were the most challenging years of his formative youth, as he experienced culture shock, and felt foreign in his own country. During the last year of junior high school he moved to Canberra, Australia, where he would join cultural programs at the Indonesian embassy doing Balinese dance on the weekends, cemented his love for Indonesian culture. After graduating the International Baccalaureate in high school, he studied architecture at the University of Sydney. Architecture provided a basis for thinking, not only about the visual but psychological and fuctional, although he realized that the working in this field would take too long to to see his works completed and was perhaps not quite the right choice of discipline for the career path he envisaged.

Auguste subsequently went back to Canberra and enrolled in the School of Art and Design at the Australian National University. It was during this most fecund of periods that he reignited his love for Indonesian arts, especially fashion and textiles, through his frequent visits to the National Gallery of Australia, an institution renowned for its world-class collection of Indonesian textiles—the largest in the southern hemisphere. In 2003, even before he decided to study fashion, Auguste had already participated as a designer in a fashion show held at said Gallery, in conjunction with the "Sari to Sarong" show, an exhibition which showcased 7 looks that incorporated Indonesian/ batik elements. This experience proved to have an everlasting influence in his continuing effort to introduce Indonesian, particularly his Javanese heritage, into global fashion in a more universal, less ethnographic manner.

After studying fashion design at the rigorous Ecole Chambre Syndicale de la Couture in Paris (alma mater of Yves Saint Laurent, Valentino, Issey Miyake and many other fashion greats. In 2007 he moved to New York to work for the American couturier Ralph Rucci, where he previously interned. The period he spent at Ralph Rucci's proved to be yet another watershed in his evolution: working on patterns in the atelier not only pushed the boundaries of pattern-making and the crucial role it plays in couture design *sans* surface ornamentation, but also gave him a chance to apply his architectural studies and to fashion from it a style all his own.

It is this principle, along for his love of Indonesian culture that became the foundation of Kraton, established in New York City in 2008; Kraton was named to honour his matrilineal grandfather's ancestry from the court of Kanoman in Cirebon, the decendants of Sunan Gunung Jati, one of the nine prophets who introduced Islamic teachings to Indonesia. The company emblem is the Paksinagaliman, a mythical creature combining the Hindu elephant god Ganesha, a Chinese dragon with the wings of the Buraq.

After his father's untimely passing in 2010, Auguste temporarily uprooted his business and moved it to Jakarta so that he could be with his mother. Though he never thought he would live and work in this city again, he lost no time in toiling and engaging new clients so as to gain traction in this new, if uncharted terrain. It was not without challenges, especially in the beginning; many of his clients were accustomed to overtly decorated designs and he struggled to maintain his own aesthetic language. Then there was the matter of training skilled workers who were not used to working with unconventional patterns and millimeter precision. Despite hardship and criticism he did prevail and his efforts rewarded; the following year he was invited to show at the closing event of the 2011 Jakarta Fashion Week (Dewi Fashion Knights). What's more, the show sparked a polarizing, if not radical debate hitherto unseen among fashion enthusiasts in Indonesia, for never before had the public witnessed a local designer present such minimalist designs on the grand runway at a couture level. Auguste wanted to provide a new perspective of luxury to the Indonesian market

From his years abroad introducing Indonesian vocabulary to international fashion, Auguste's move to Jakarta proved itself timely: it provided him the opportunity to present a different take on high fashion and influence younger Indonesian designers starved for new, innovative ideas. Having pioneered the idea of "clean design", he continues to push his own boundaries and explore different sub-categories to further distinguish his work from other designers.

In 2016, he held a 2-week mini exhibition at dia.lo.gue art space in Jakarta, preferring to showcase his work in a gallery rather than in the more conventional runway format, where the subtle complexities are quickly lost. The exhibition, titled "Architecture of Cloth," was meant to demonstrate the amount of tedious techniques and man-hours required to construct deceptively simple looking garments. There were 3 sub-themes to this exhibition, the last being "reduction," an attempt to minimize the overall number of pattern pieces and seams.

The self-set goal was to achieve single patters for each garment without compromising the aesthetics, which was not yet possible for certain pieces at the time. Twenty-two singular pattern garments, the result of years of research and evolution are featured in the MINIMALISM section of this exhibition. They are testimony to Auguste's genius as a designer and visual artist.

njawani

architecture

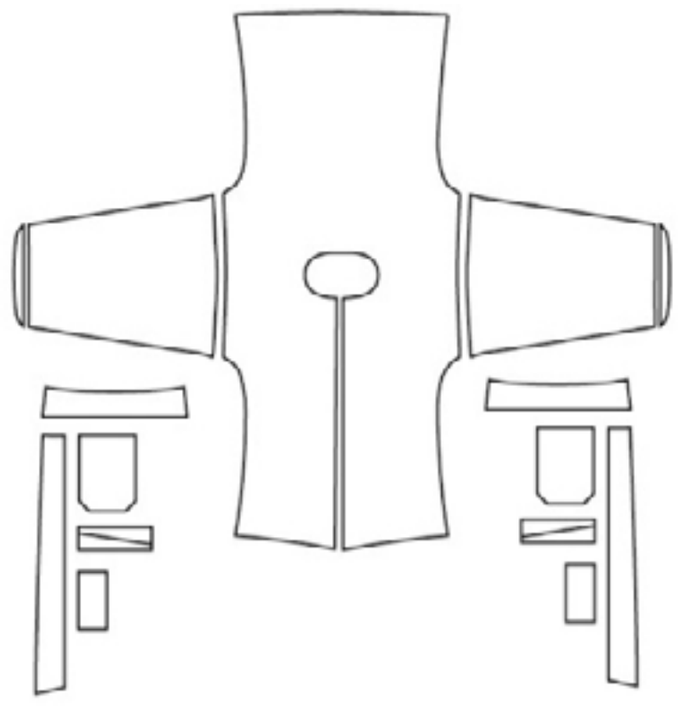
minimalism

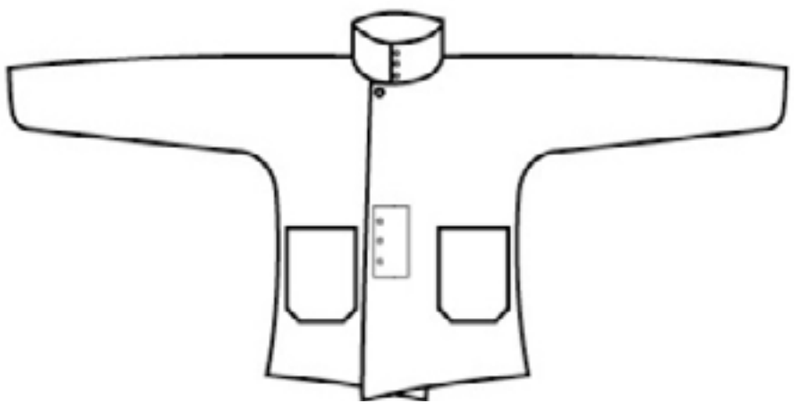
ഞാൻവരാംഞ njawani

The embracing of customs,
lifestyle and philosophy of the Javanese.

To a large extent, Soesastro's rich cultural background was shaped by his family's complex history of four centuries of cultural migration. Before the 1700s, his male ancestors arrived in Java as settlers from Southern China. All of them married local women. Their offspring, also known as Peranakans, later intermarried with other settler communities including those of Arabic descent. Kraton was named to honou his matrilineal grandfather's ancestry from the court of Kanoman in Cirebon, the company emblem is the Paksinagaliman, a mythical creature combining the Hindu elephant god Ganesha, a Chinese dragon with the wings of the Buraq.

In the Javanese courts, specific decrees were imposed by reigning rulers which prohibited the general public from wearing particular designs and motifs, also on who in the kingdom was to wear particular designs to denote their rank in society. Soesastro wanted to democratise these looks without disrespecting the courts. For his debut collection in New York 2009, he presented a royal Javanese inspired collection to introduce sophisticated Indonesian culture, comprised of quintessential Javanese garments that have been ergonomically and (materially/fabrication) re-evaluated to be accessible and non-ethnographic to an international audience of any gender. The garments were studied to understand the origin of cut, tracing historical documents of how they became part of the Javanese dressing vocabulary. By understanding the transnational history of these garments, designs can then evolve, devoid of static tradition, borders, politics and outdated taboos.





J01

Surjan
(2019)

Italian cotton shirting

By deconstructing the pattern of the surjan, the 'etymological' origin of the cut can be traced from western asia to the far east, this was clearly an influence of trade. *By understanding this, the design evolves beyond the limitations of 'tradition'.*

J02 Unisex Beskap
(2022)

technological crepe
cotton batik

J03

unisex beskap
(2019)

technological crepe

The beskap is an early example of cultural crossdressing between Dutch & Javanese clothing without completely collapsing the distinction between the two. At one point Prince Mangkunagara was in a quandary concerning dress: his official costume for in-house Kraton affairs was too formal for the occasion, yet even his finest unceremonial evening wear was, he feared, not respectful enough. In a stroke of brilliance, the prince took scissors to his formal Dutch tails (rokkie Walandi), snipped off the coat's tails (giving the garment a clean cutaway back to make space for a handsome keris), put on his finest batik (rather than trousers), and made the fashion statement of 1870s Surakarta.

- *John Pemberton On the Subject of Java*

J04 Beskap Dress
(2008 remade 2023)

technological crepe

J05

patchwork beskap
(2018)

Italian suiting wool

An example of how fashions were created by reigning rulers of a certain period and later on cemented as tradition amonst the people made from remnants of suiting wool.

Collection of Mme. Restu Imansari Kusumaningrum

J06 Batik Patchwork Coat
(2020)

made from remnants of silk
and cotton batik

J07 Kebaya Coat
(2013)

double faced cashmere

The kebaya, and by extension, any kind of fashion, rather than being a pure symbol of one race or nationality, has such a hybrid and convoluted transnational history. The Kebaya also overturns notions of fashion being purely a western concept and of the idea of a static Asian traditional costume. The challenge is that all these narratives of race, nationality and the East - West dichotomy that we inherited, still hold sway.

- Peter Lee, historian, author of Sarong Kebaya

J08

Collar Study
(2018)

acrylic on canvas
40 x 40 x 10 cm

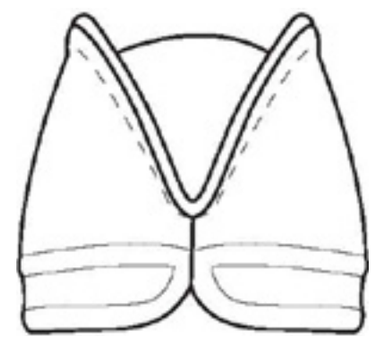
Introducing a new element into Javanese clothes, no lapels, because Javanese clothes do not require ties, therefore lapels have no function.

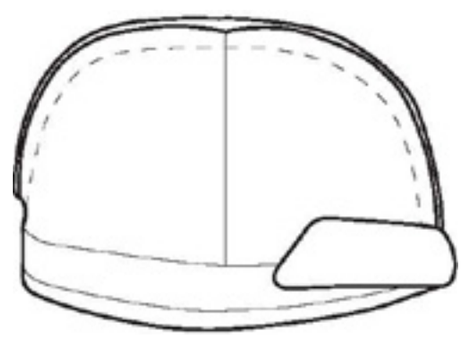
What is the function of lapels?
Being that they are nothing more than folded bands of fabric, you might be wondering what purpose lapels serve. Lapels do not serve any functional purpose. Rather, they are used for aesthetic purposes. With lapels, suit jackets offer a more formal style that's synonymous with men's formalwear.

J09

cropped beskap
(2023)

cashmere wool blend
silk





J10

Blangkon
(2008)

leather

Soesastro's blangkon is tailored from pattern pieces, rather than traditionally tied or stitched from a triangular fabric. This was done on purpose to break out of the cultural confines of who can wear what and on what occasion, to allow it to be worn by anyone (any gender /status) for any season with the practicality of a beanie whilst maintaining the 'look'.

J11 aristocratic ensemble
(2008)

double faced cashmere beskap
with antique Javanese buckle
cotton batik overskirt, viscose
batik trousers

J12

Kanjeng Putri
(2008)

with Batik Skirt
(2022)

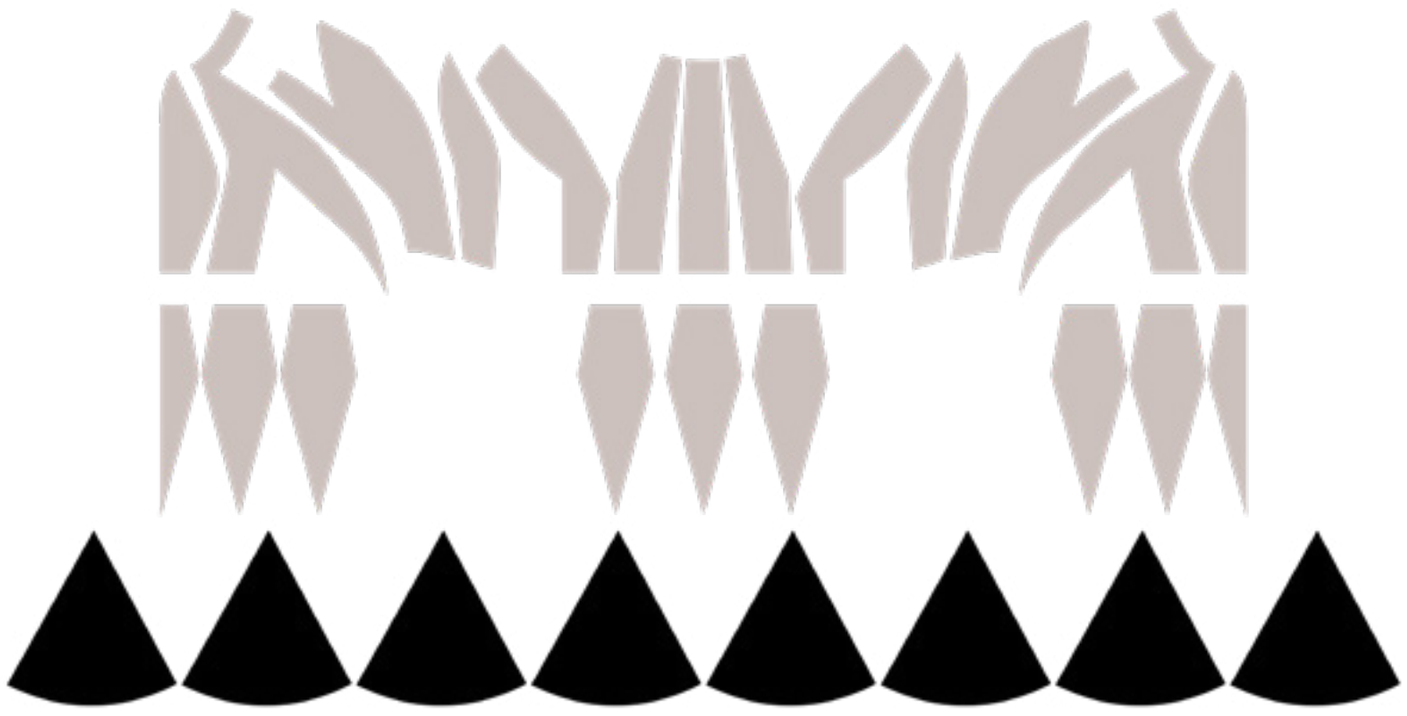
mikado
silk batik

architecture

Challenging conventional methods of pattern-making.

Construction and engineering were always part of Soesastro's pattern making from the very beginning of his career. Architecture only became a prominent theme when he moved to Jakarta in 2011. He observed Indonesian fashion was still largely dominated by looks inspired by runway collections from other countries with slight modifications, lacking innovation. There is a limit to originality when looking for inspiration from fashion references, so he began looking for inspirations in architectural studies such as biomimetics, mathematics and futurism. This was a turning point in his research for highly experimental cuts that defied traditional pattern making; as displayed in the construction diagrams. Soesastro also periodically guest lectured at a few different fashion institutions in Indonesia, making it his responsibility to push his students to justify their designs with evidence of research and also set an example of the endless possibilities in searching for inspiration.

When Soesastro presented his first mini exhibition titled Architecture of Cloth in 2016 at dia.lo.gue art space Jakarta, he highlighted this aspect of the craft by displaying a selection of pattern studies and breakdowns. This section of the exhibition shows Soesastro's pattern studies that take the form of artworks, which he hangs at home as a constant reminder to challenge himself to further experiment with ideas of cut and new ways of constructing clothing.



A01 cyclone Dress
(2017)

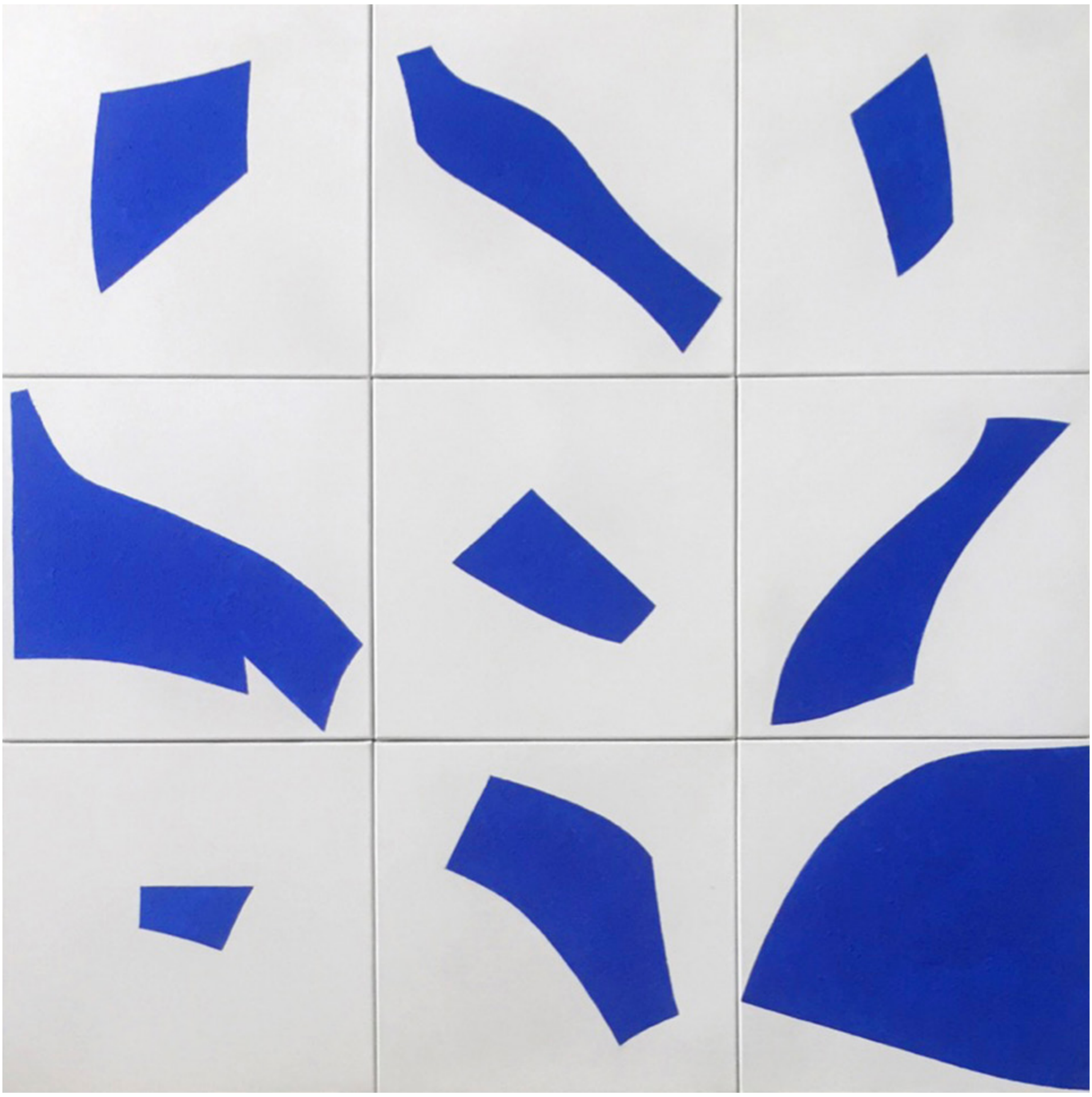
flax linen

A02 futuristic beskap
(2012 remade 2023)

pineapple fibre

A03 scarab Jacket
(2016 remade 2023)

silk

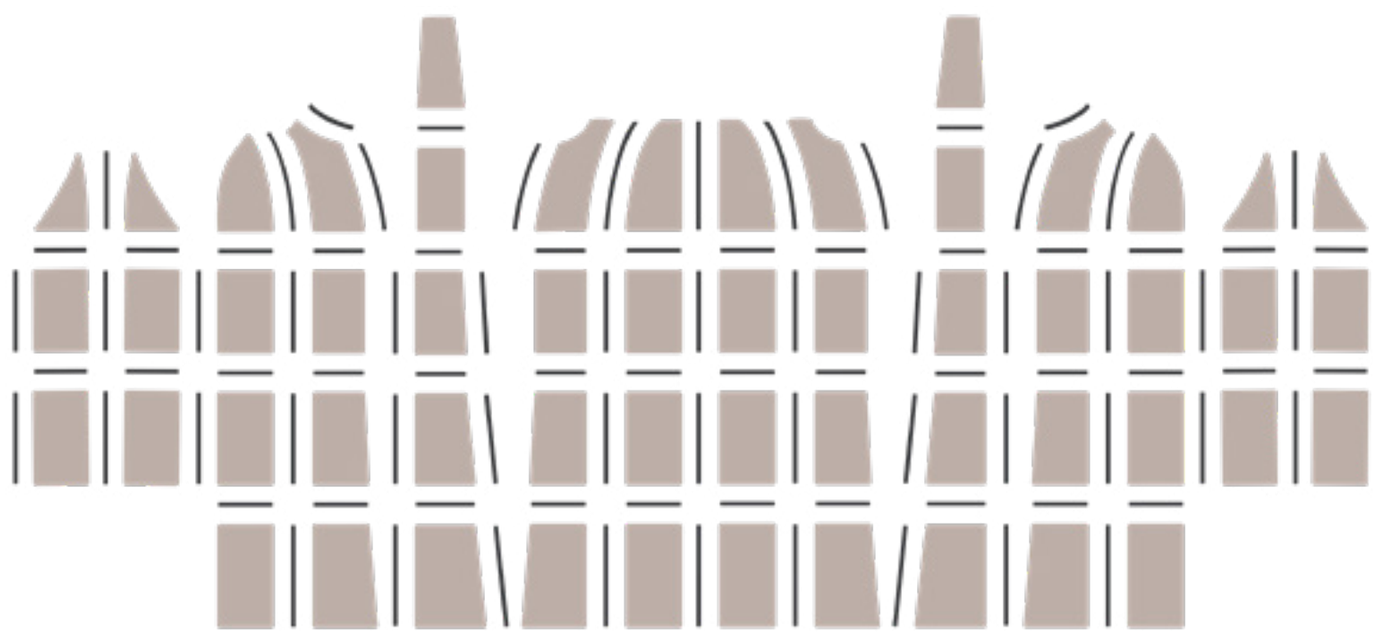


A04 scarab Jacket pattern painting
(2016)

acrylic on canvas
123 x 123 x 3 cm

A05 igloo cape
(2017)

double faced cashmere



A06 dressform grid coat
(2016)

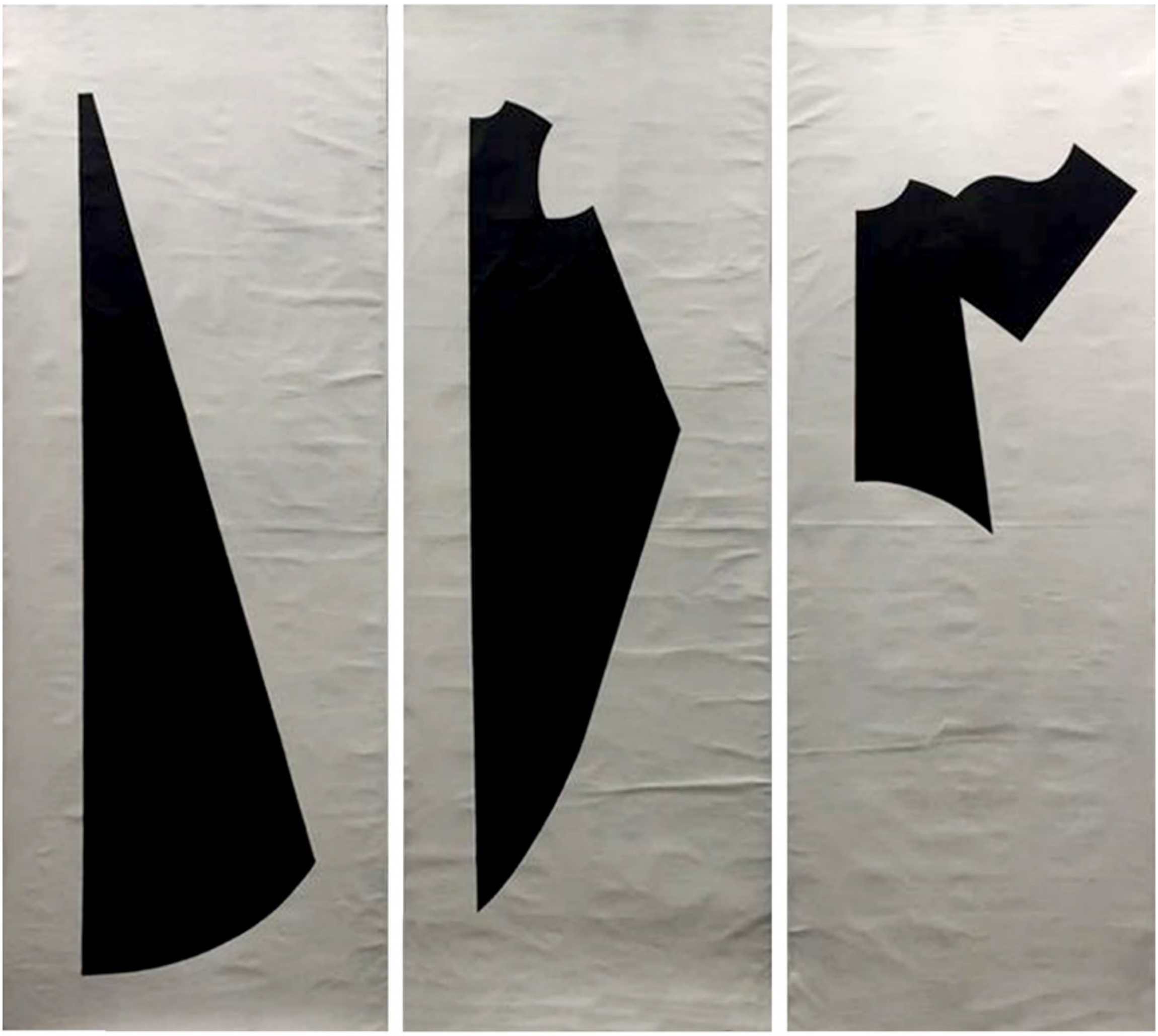
double faced linen

A07 Guggenheim Coat
(2017 remade 2023)

cashmere wool blend

A08 Titan Arum Top
(2012 remade in 2023)

polished flax linen



A09 Titan Arum Top Pattern
hanging scrolls
(2018 reworked 2023)

acrylic on linen, wood, steel
200 x 71 x 3 cm (each)

A10 Turtle Jacket
(2017 remade 2023)

water hyacinth, cotton insets

Biomimetic architecture takes inspiration from nature, whether for forms, façade design, or even the functioning of an entire structure.

1.

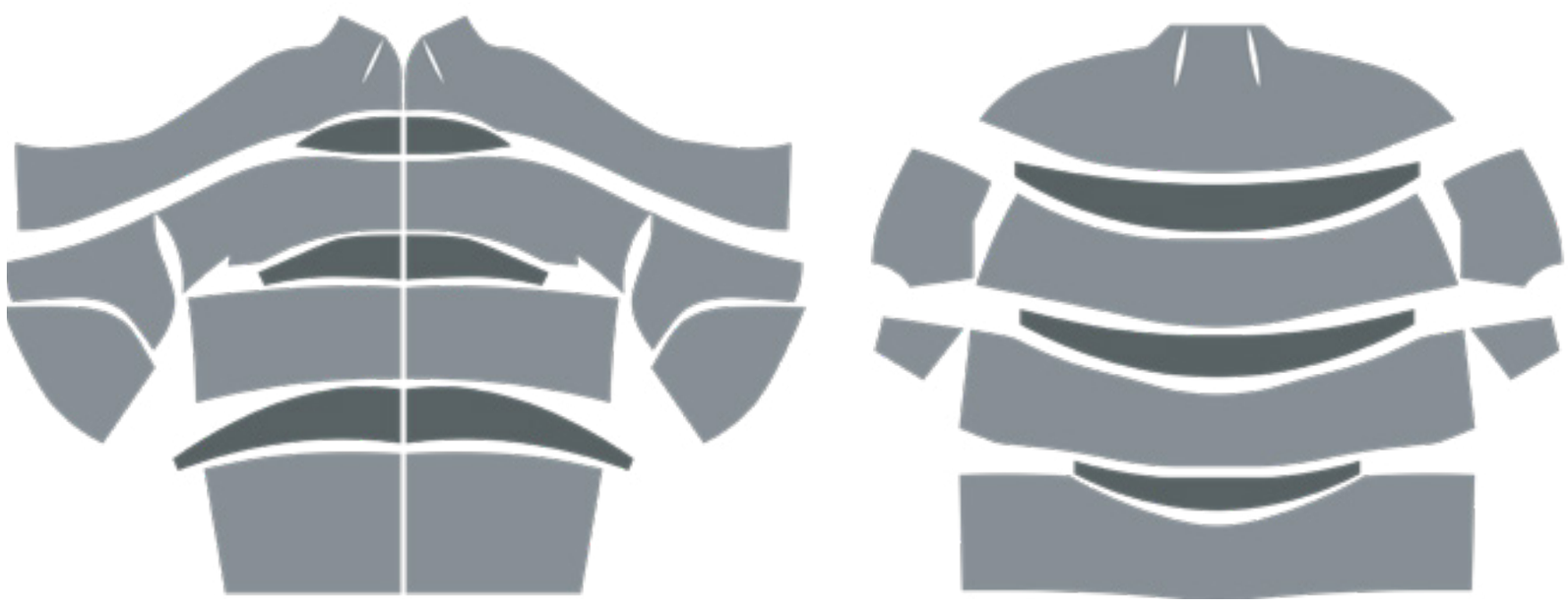
2.

3.

A11 Study of a Sleeve #1, #2, #3
(2016 reworked 2023)

acrylic on canvas

1. gusseted kimono sleeve
   70 x 60 x 13 cm
2. biomorphic sleeve as seen
   on scarab, turtle, armadillo
   70 x 50 x 13 cm
3. classic set in sleeve
   70 x 50 x 11 cm

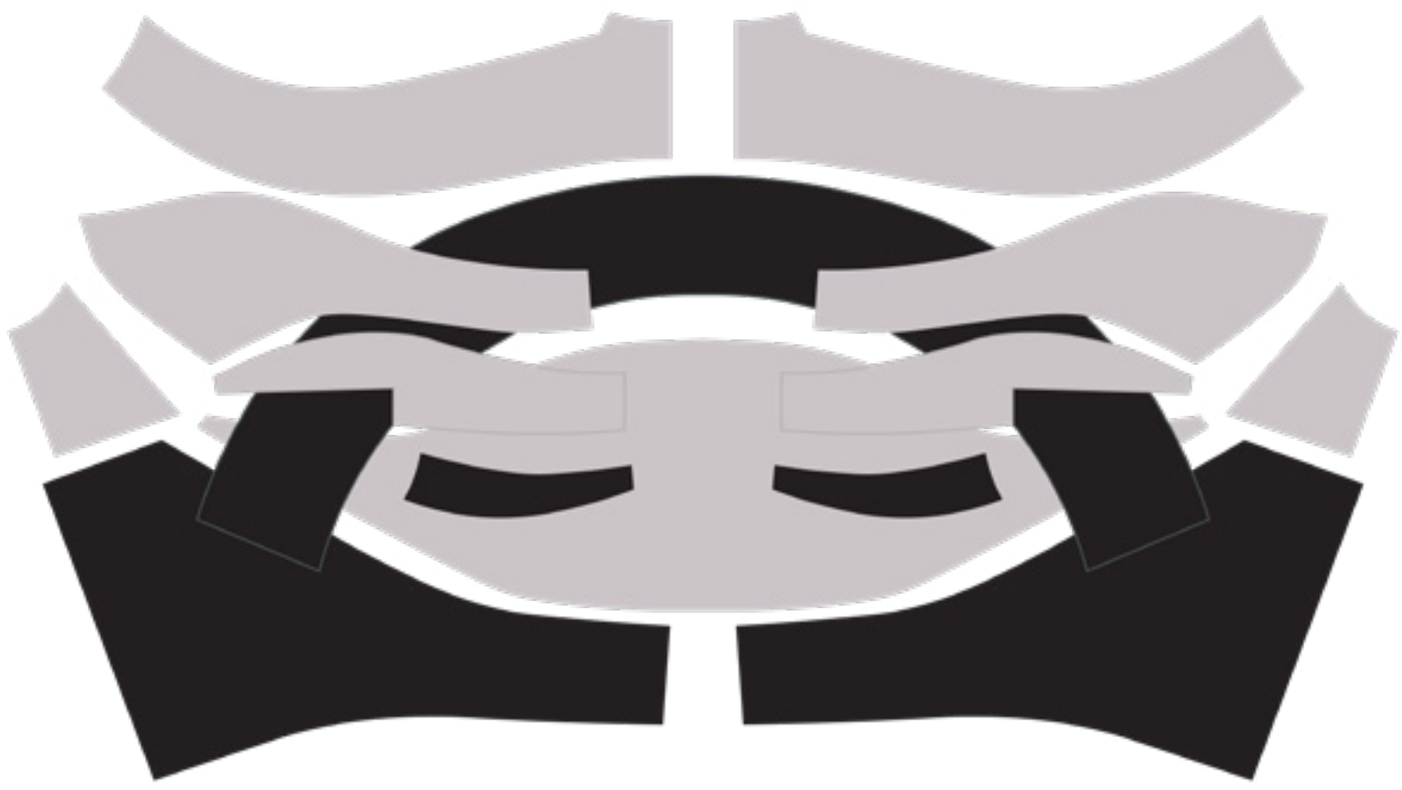


A12 Armadillo Jacket
(2016 remade 2020)

water repellent microfibre

A13 Tier Ensemble
(2017 remade 2023)

silk gazaar



A14 Torque Elllipse Jacket
(2016 remade 2023)

flax linen

A15 Torque Ellipse Jacket Pattern
(2017)

acrylic on canvas
120 x 120 x 5 cm

minimalism

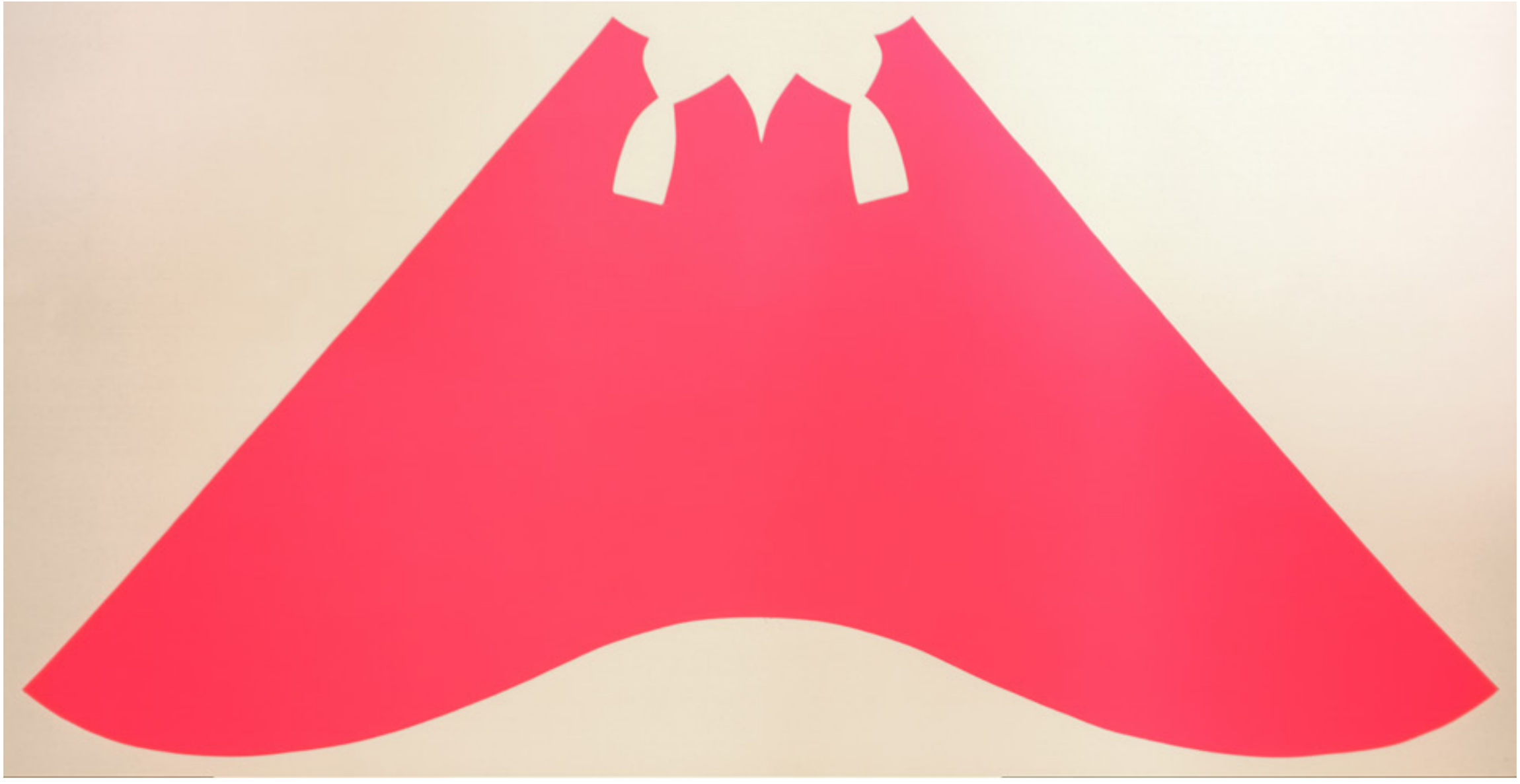
Simplicity is easy, minimalism is complex.

The pattern *is* the design. Since his debut, Soesastro had an obsession for making clothes from single patterns. These garments were always included in his runway looks, appearing very clean and understated despite the precision and intricate craftsmanship it requires; not to mention the countless hours of trial and error. The development of a single pattern jacket shown in this section, next to an earlier version called 'the reduction jacket', spans a decade. It took Soesastro ten years to find a successful solution to remove a sleeve under gusset pattern, in order for the jacket to be made entirely from one pattern.

Twenty-two single-pattern garments, developed over the course of years of research and evolution, are testimony to Soesastro's relentless pursuit of perfectionism and understated elegance.
A systematic discipline for discerning what is absolutely essential, then eliminating everything that is not, in order to make the highest possible contribution toward the things that really matter.

M01 Titan Arum Dress

technological fabric

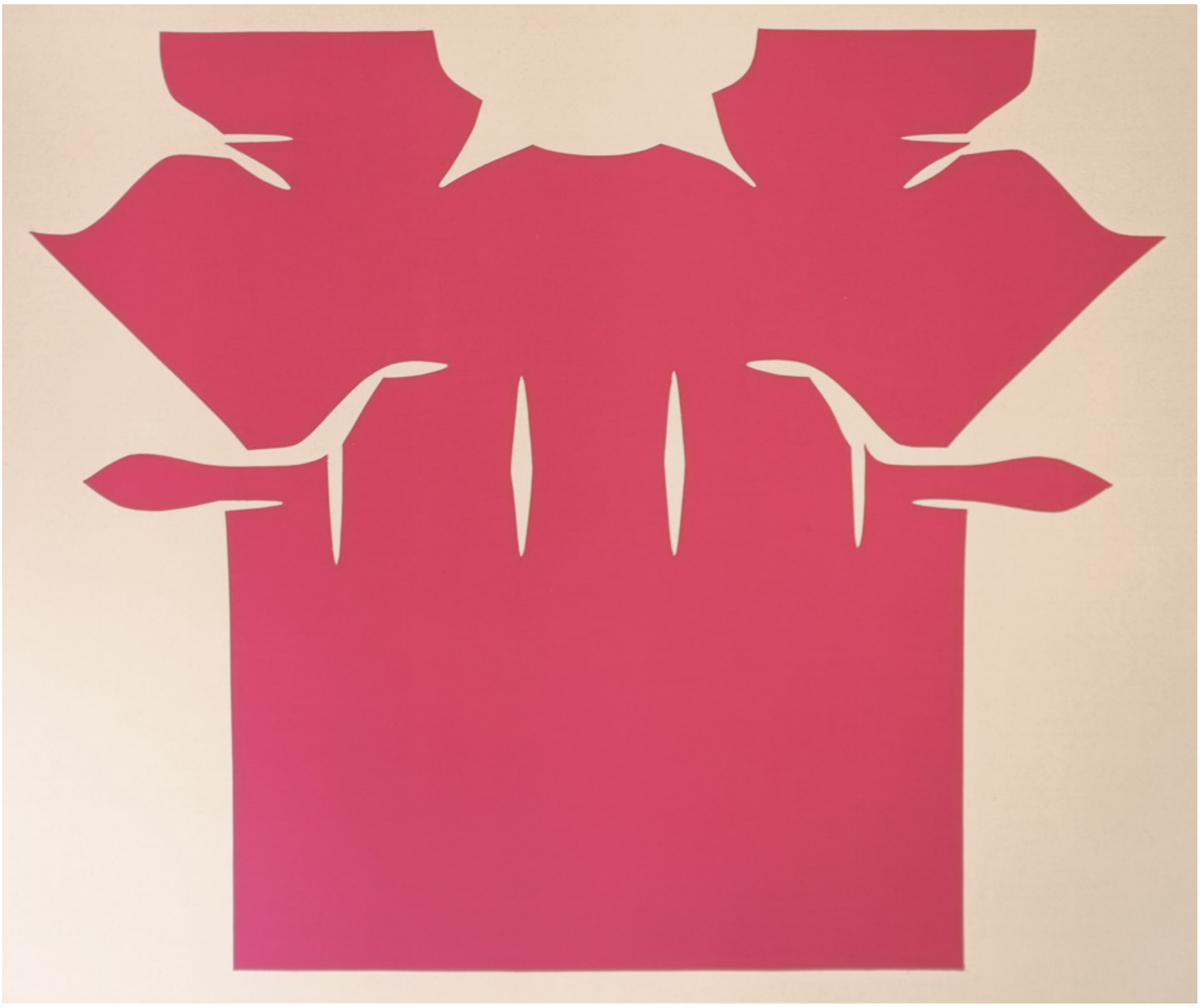


M02

cotton on wood frame
147 x 287 x 5 cm

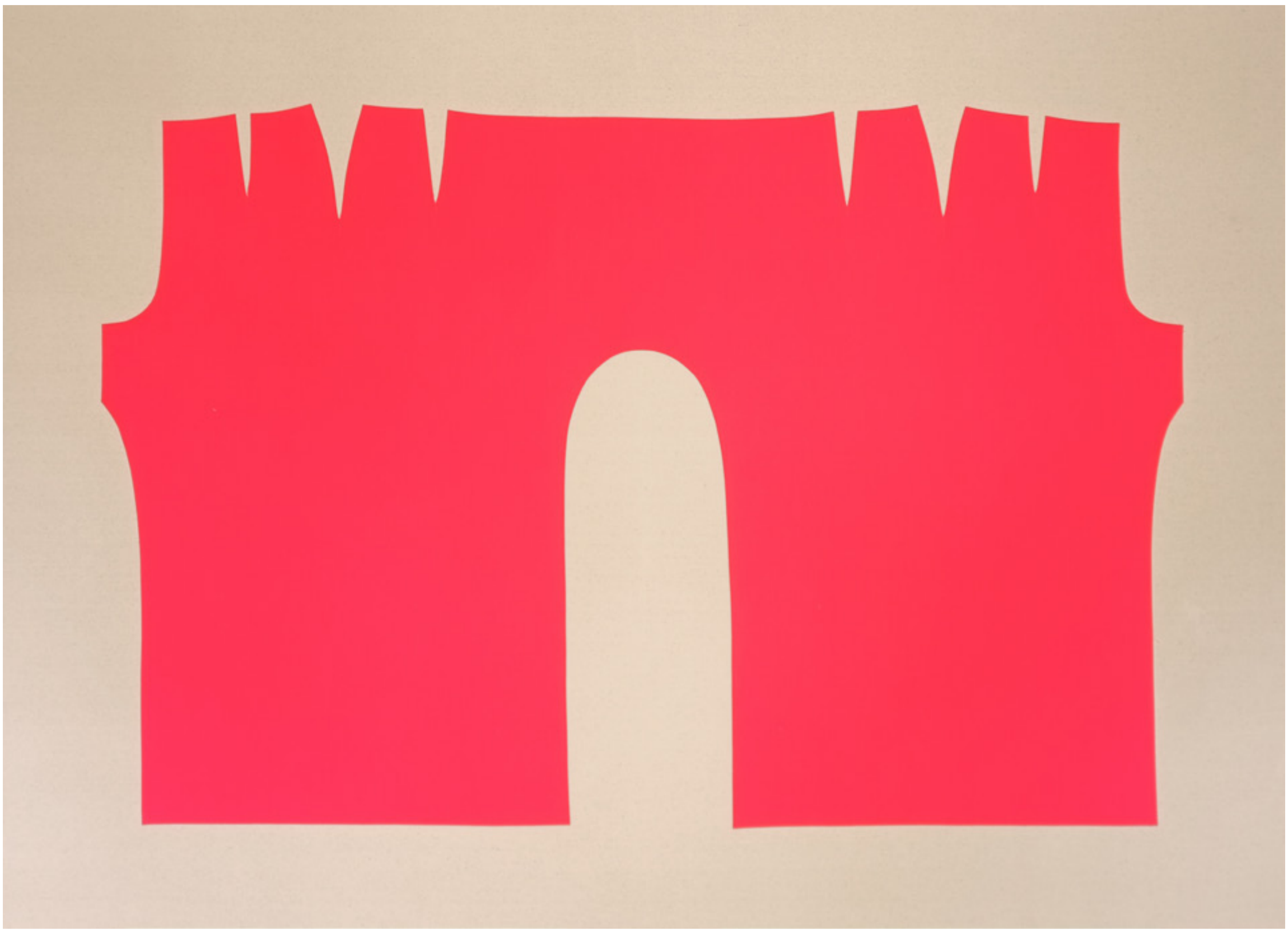
M03 Bow Coat

mikado



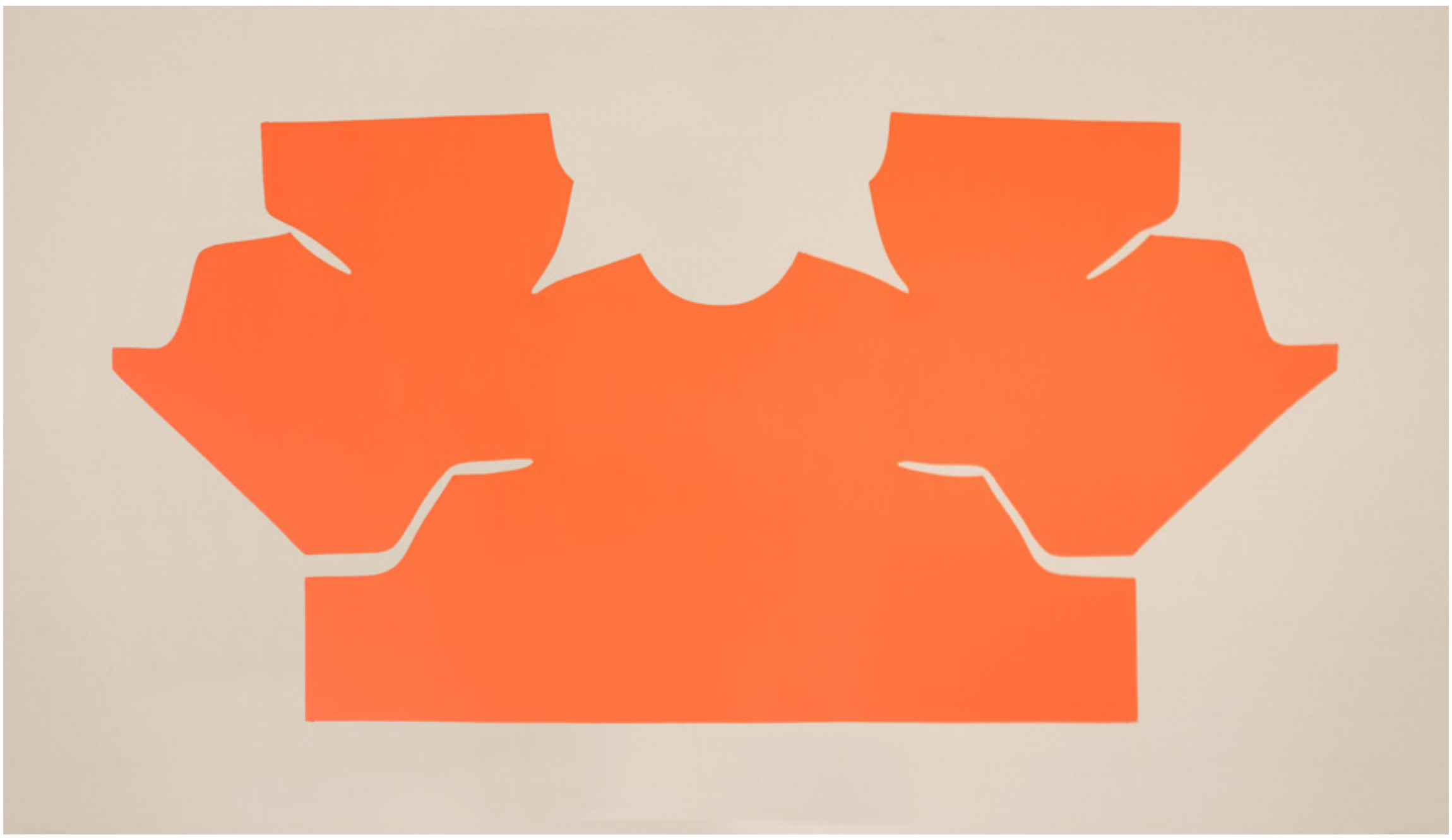
M04

cotton on wood frame
150 x 177 x 5 cm



M05 Pants

cotton on wood frame
126.5 x 174.5 x 5 cm



M06

cotton on wood frame
104 x 180 x 5 cm

M07 Celadon Top & Skirt

flax linen

M08 Kebaya Coat

cotton on wood frame
148 x 160 x 5 cm

M09 Titan Arum Top & Culotte Pants

viscose acetate duchesse

M10 One Shoulder Dress

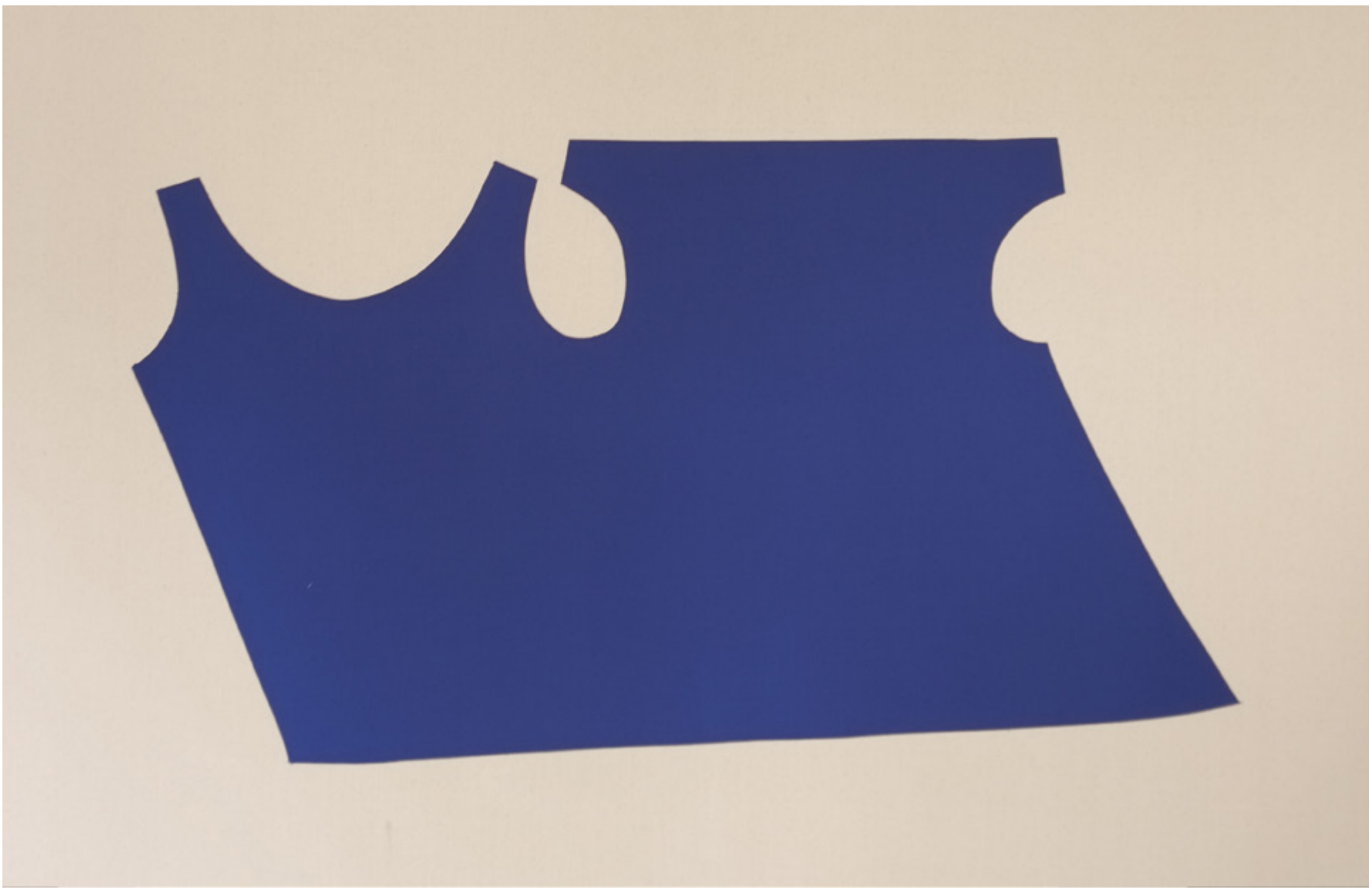
technological crepe

M11

cotton on wood frame
178.5 x 145.5 x 5 cm

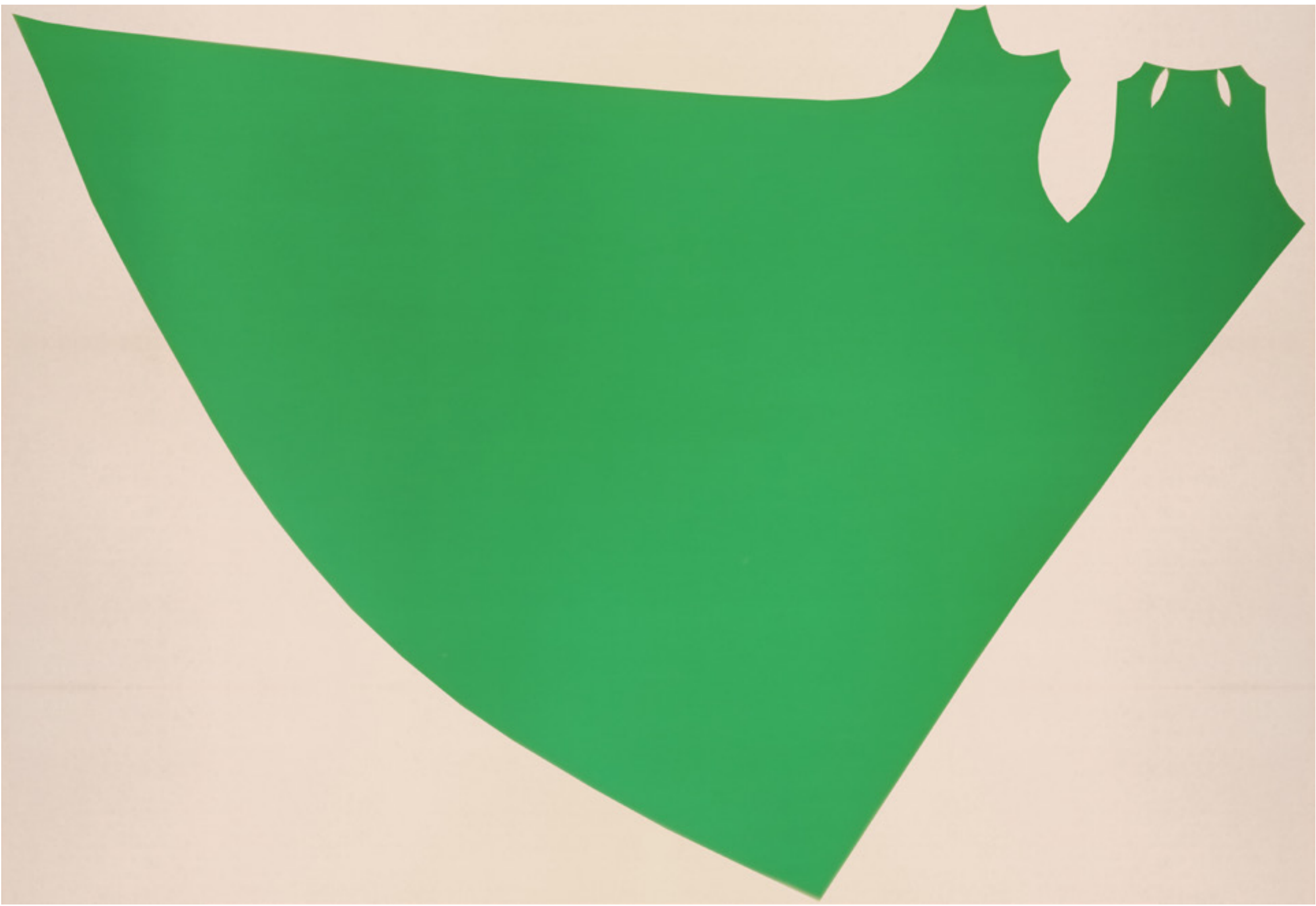
M12 Drape Top & Bias Skirt

technological crepe



M13

cotton on wood frame
94 x 144 x 5 cm

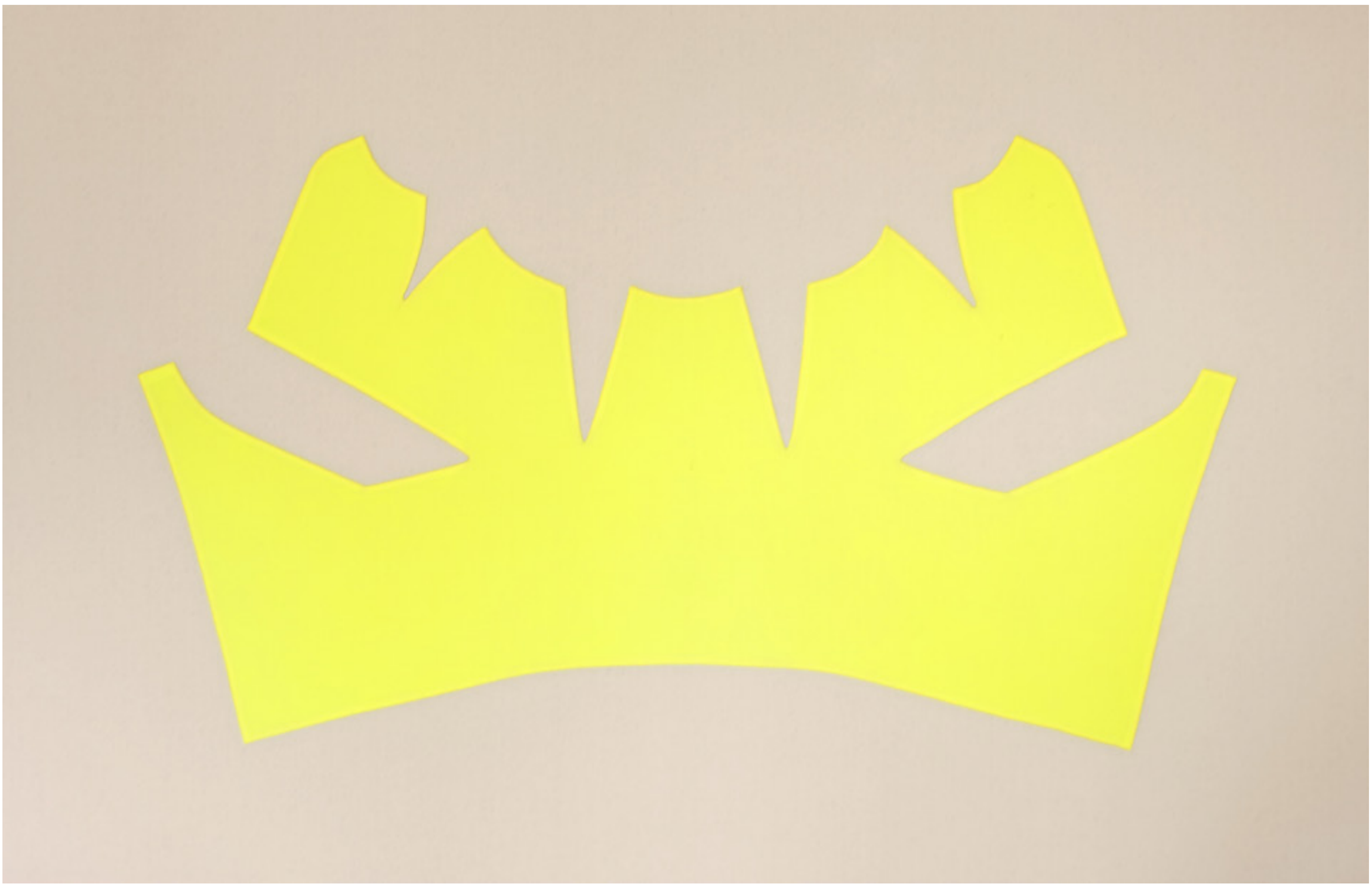


M14

cotton on wood frame
154 x 224 x 5 cm

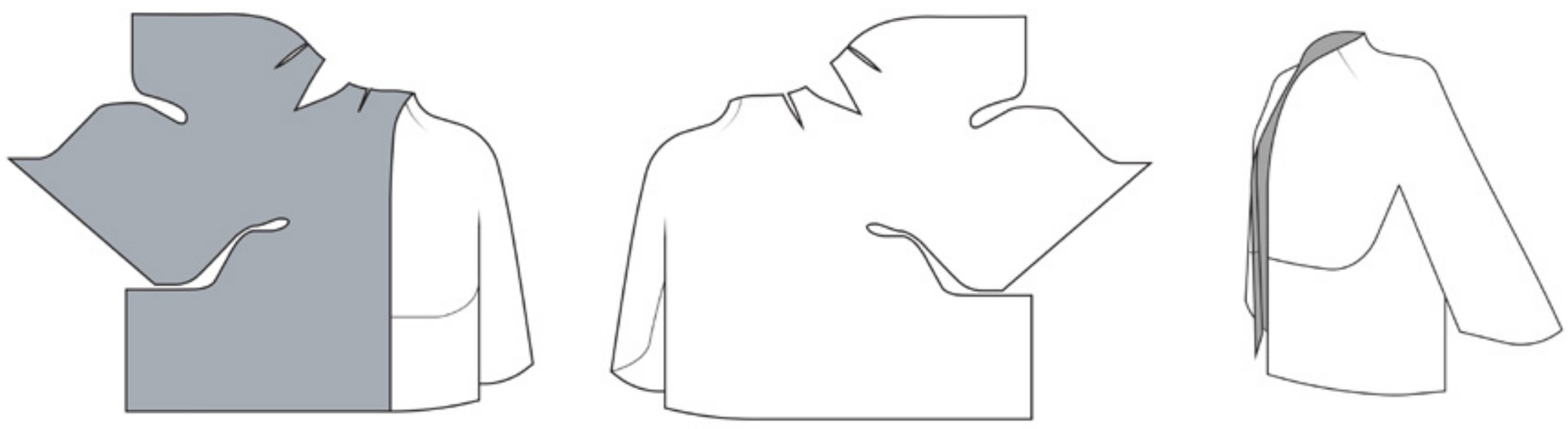
M15 Long Halter Dress

technological crepe



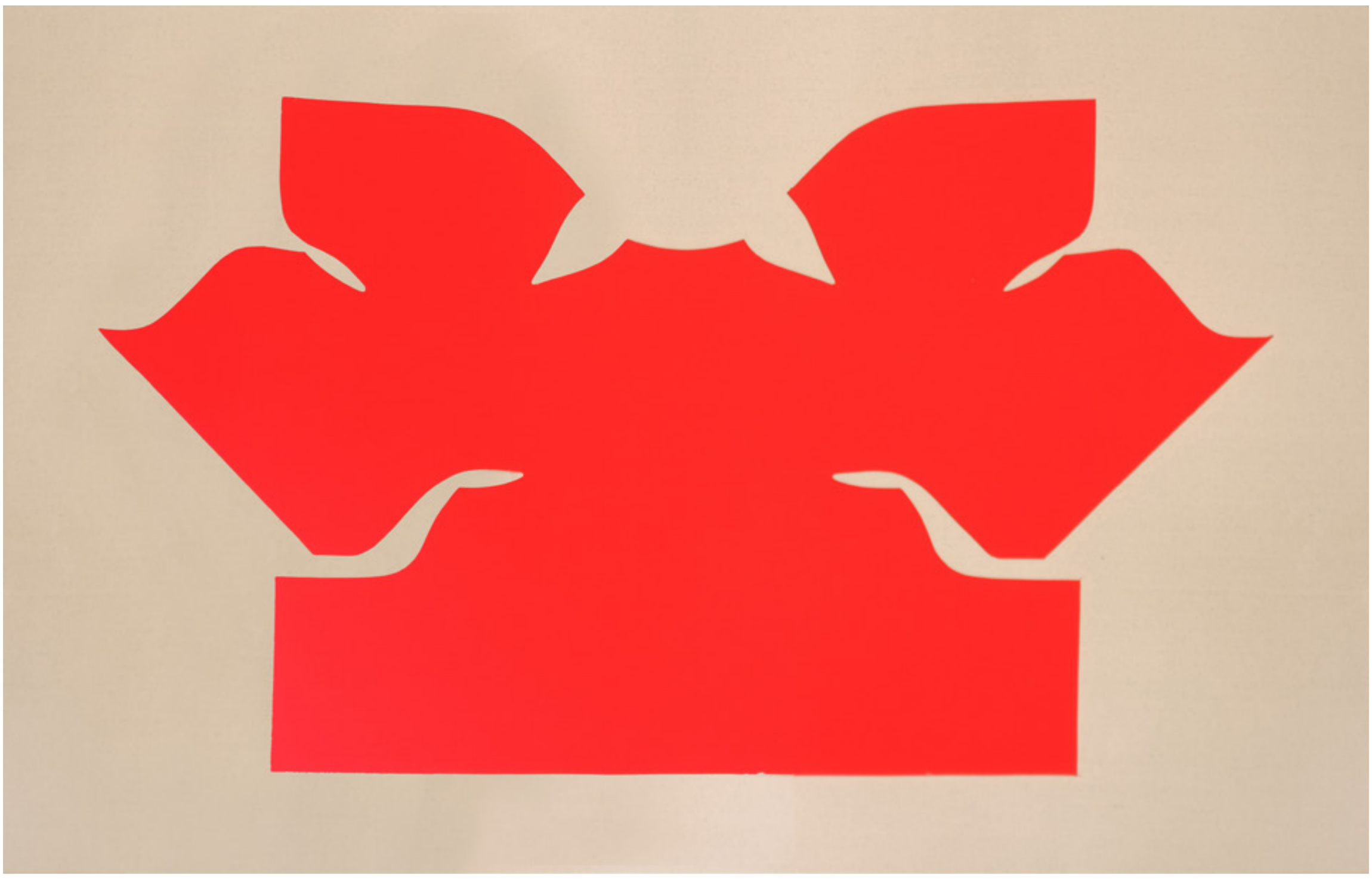
M16 Top

cotton on wood frame
93 x 140 x 5 cm



M17 Imperial Collar Jacket
(2020)

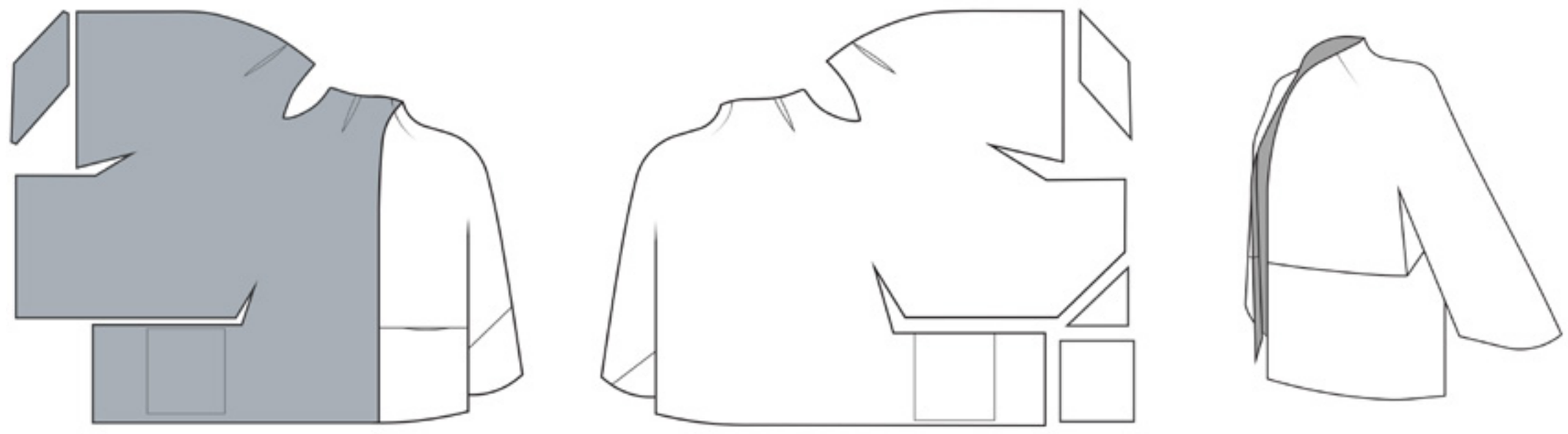
double faced wool



M18

cotton on wood frame
125 x 196 x 5 cm

The development of a single pattern jacket shown in this section, next to an earlier version of 'the reduction jacket,' spans a decade.
It took Soesastro ten years to find a successful solution to remove a sleeve under gusset pattern, in order for the jacket to be made entirely from one pattern.



M19 Reduction Jacket
(2010)

double faced wool

M20

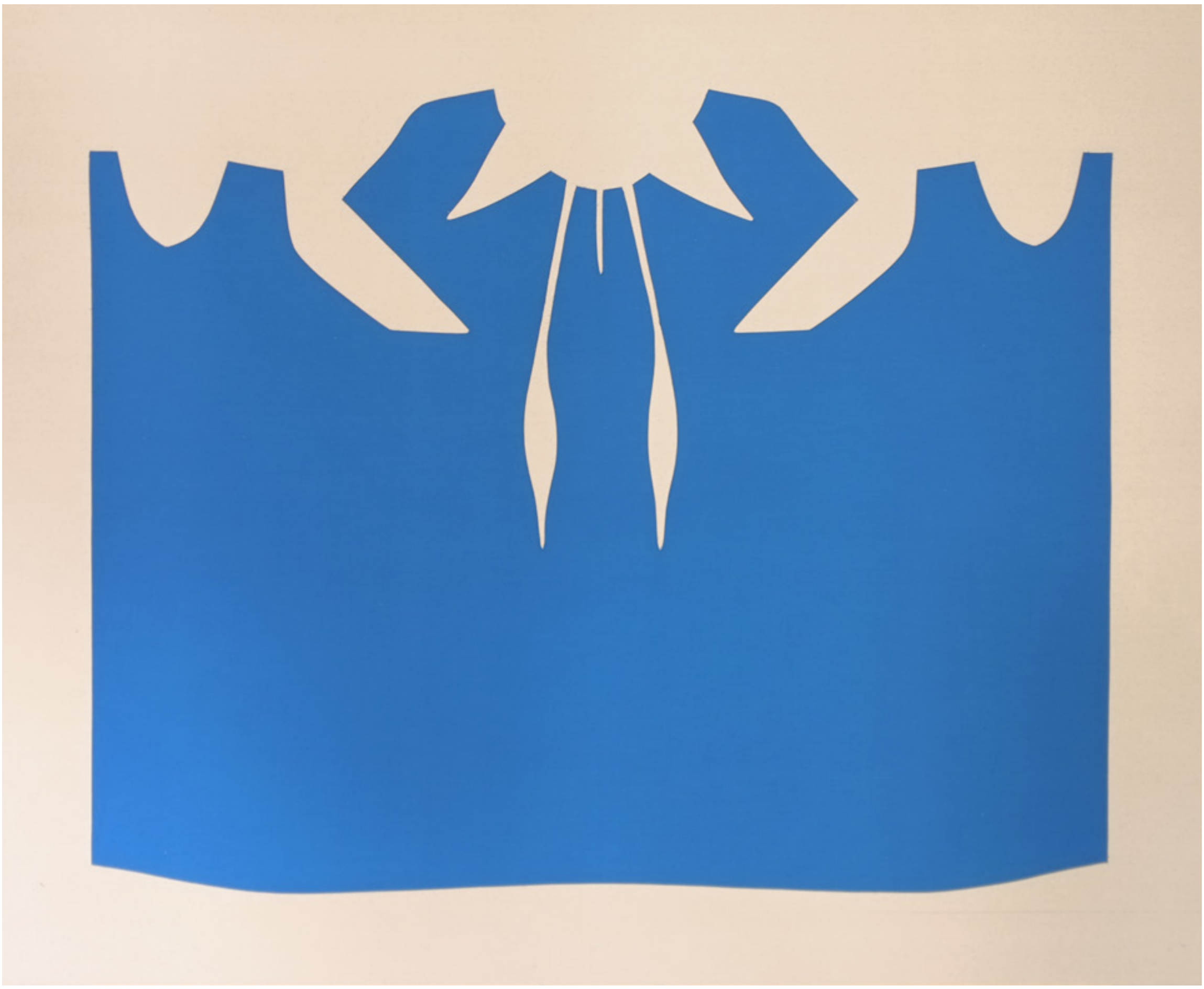
cotton on wood frame
123 x 176.5 x 5 cm

M21 Shawl Collar Jacket

technological fabric

M22 Winged Dress *Collection of Mr. Chandra Satria*

silk

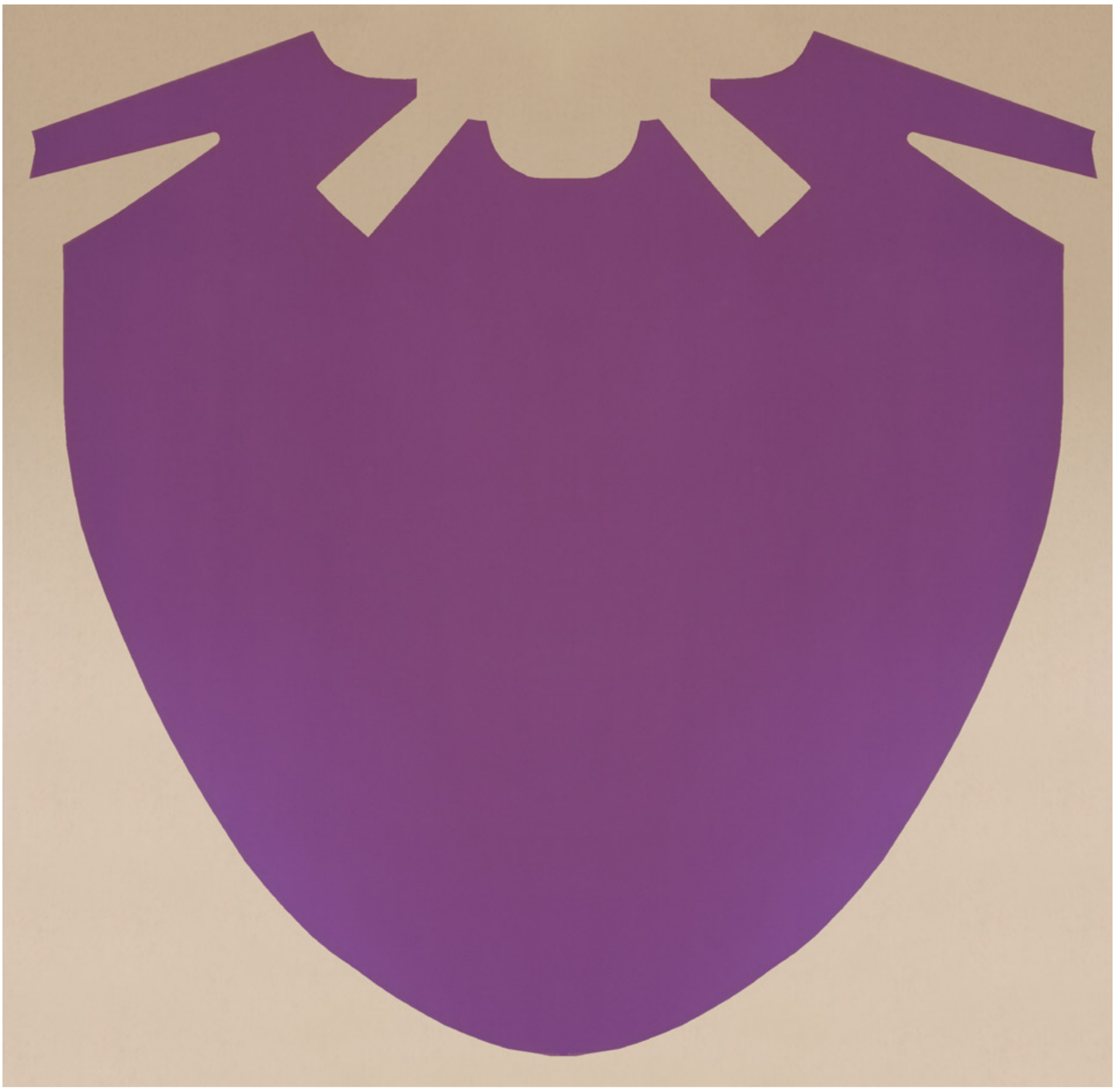


M23

cotton on wood frame
150 x 183 x 5 cm

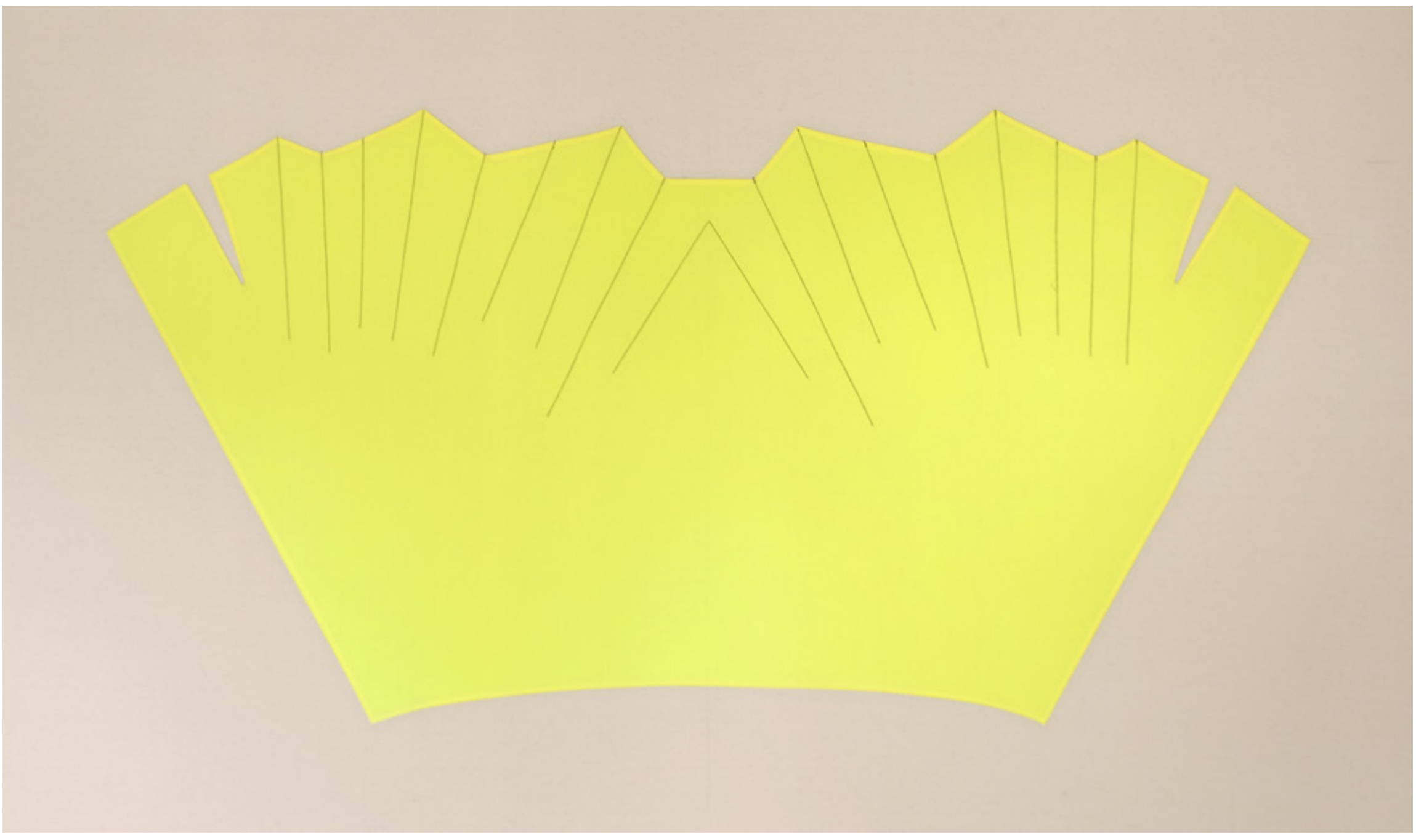
M24 Titan Arum Top Gazaar

silk gazaar
mikado



M25

cotton on wood frame
150 x 153.5 x 5 cm



M26 Skirt

cotton on wood frame
110 x 179.5 x 5 cm

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