

FREE SALE

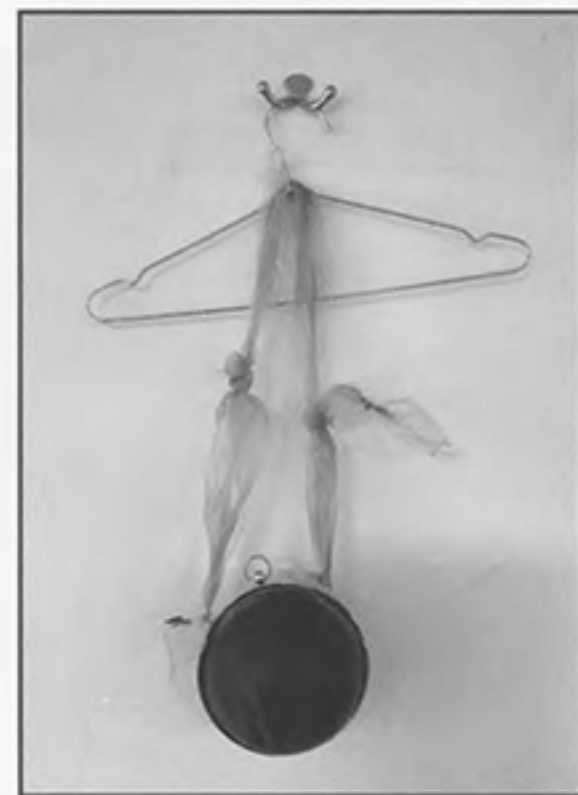


I do believe that hoarding can be hereditary. I also think that it stems from loss. My Gallagher grandparents were extreme hoarders. My grandfather grew up with poverty (his family were homesteaders out in Alaska), and they suffered quite a bit of loss in their lives. They hoarded stuff to the point where there was nothing but a small path through enormous piles of stuff connecting the different rooms of the house that they needed to go to. If you would try to go down to the basement you would only get halfway down the stairs before immediately walking on stuff that was slowly filling up the entire room—the ceiling would be close above your head.

BY
AVENA
GALLAGHER

I think I inherited a bit of that. I grew up in a house with 5 siblings, some extended family, and our grandparents, so there was just a ton of stuff in our house—tons and tons of clothes from all of us that my grandmother would tirelessly try to organize. We had a basement laundry room where all the walls were shelved and full of clothes. There'd be dressers in the garage that were full of clothes, dressers in the backyard that were full of clothes—most of which we'd outgrown. My grandparents being immigrants, they also had a hard time throwing away good stuff that wasn't yet considered garbage. Maybe I was always used to material accumulation, but I also think that my hoarding has deeper emotional roots: I often identify with discarded things and tend to reclaim all types of stuff that I know nobody will see value in. I guess the logic is to honour that thing with value and tuck it away and hold on to it for weird emotional reasons.

Add to that the fact that my job is about accumulating stuff to use in shoots or for anything else. After shoots, there's the stuff that you can return, there's the stuff that you can give to the client, but there's always a whole bunch of stuff that either gets thrown away, or if you're me, you hold onto it. You think you may be able to use it later, or you don't wanna throw it away, or nobody else wants it, so I feel bad for it; I feel bad for the stuff that nobody wants, so I decide that I'm gonna want it, so that it doesn't feel bad. Then I would get a storage unit and then another storage unit and then another storage unit. From this awareness of my hoarding, I think, I always rationalised the fact that I was holding onto stuff because I knew there was this project I wanted to do.

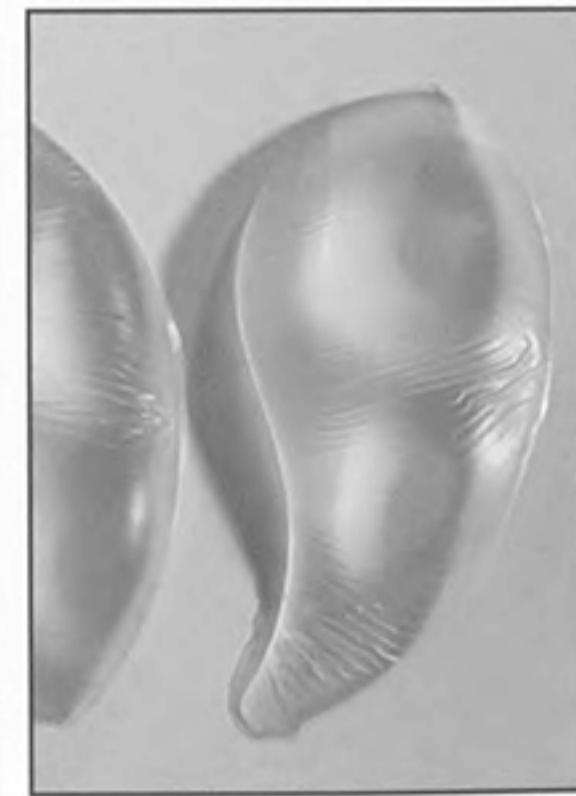
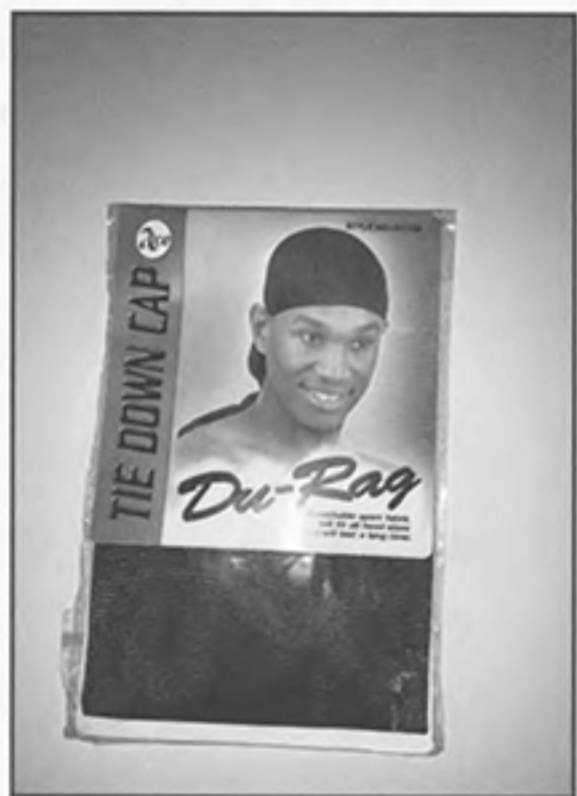
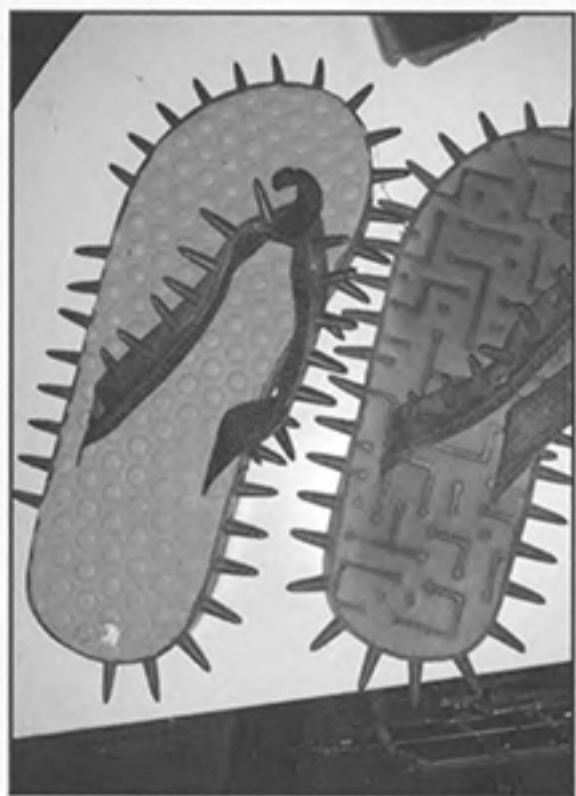
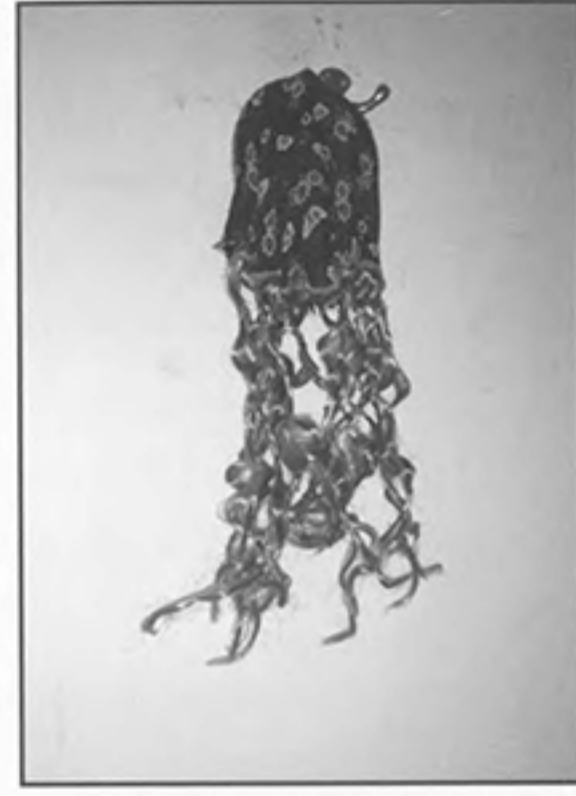
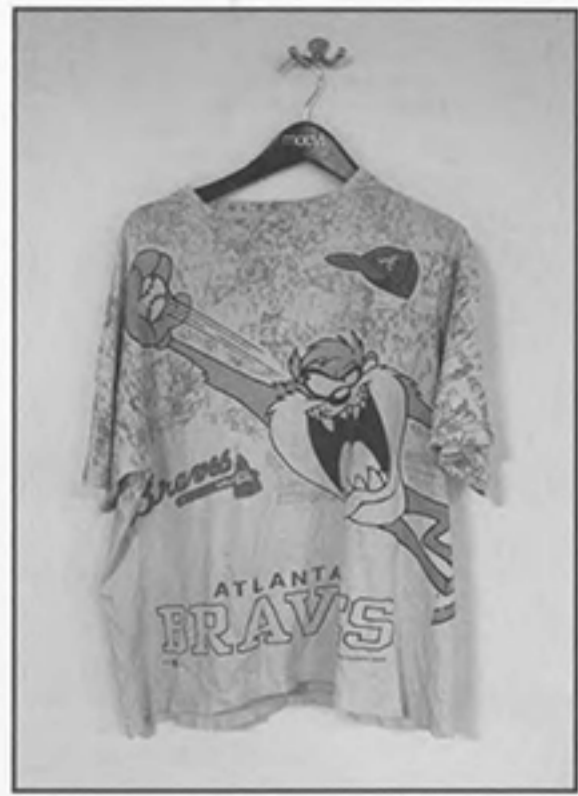


I do think my inherited hoarding influenced me in becoming a stylist, at least subconsciously. I came to New York because I wanted to become a fashion designer, but I came here when I was really young, with no money, to start fashion school. I had to drop out of the program because I couldn't afford the supply list. Styling was the next best thing, as I could still work with clothes. Styling is very material. I mean, at least my practice is. Certainly it is immaterial in many ways, but you're kind of doing collage work: you're organizing and balancing colour, texture, and shapes. It is quite physical: you're trying to use physical elements to make them add up to something that is more ineffable, something immaterial.

I feel like with any other type of artist, a stylist also has their favourite materials—their repertoire of stuff that they like to use, and reasons why they like those things. I happen to be partial to using things that are in my hoard just because they happen to have a lot of emotional meaning to me, and I have imbued a lot of these things with various other meanings, and those things add up to the meaning of a certain composition of clothes or a look or whatever. For that reason I like to keep all this stuff that I have.

I had the idea for *Free Sale* for a long time but I didn't really know how to go about it. Originally I wanted to do it outside, just on the street, set up an outdoor store that was unattended by anyone. The store would be filmed by a surveillance camera, just to see if people would take stuff. In the end, an opportunity came up through Camilla Nickerson with artist Rob Pruitt, and that became the very first *Free Sale*. It may have been the very late 90s... Or early 2000s. The 2020 edition, in Chinatown, was the fourth reiteration. I have been invited to do a fifth iteration, but let's see what the health situation is...

The retail element of *Free Sale* is kind of a joke to me. It's kind of a joke to set it up like a store, but you don't have to pay. I guess it's inspired by





a bunch of different things... for example, when I am looking for seashells on the beach, I really feel like I'm shopping. Like, *I'm shopping*. And I think this activity of shopping is so normalized to us; it's become an integral part of life even if it's a recent invention of capitalism. It's an activity that in our lifetime has gone out of control, I think—there's this obsession with expensive things, an obsession with consuming in itself. Everything is shopping. Our phones are shopping devices, our computers are shopping devices, it's so easy to shop that a drone will bring you what you bought. It's not something I thought about before (or maybe I did), but I wanted to show that it's possible to have shopping without payment.



I'M SHOPPING



I regret everything that I've let go of because my brain works in some kind of archival way. My Filipino grandmother has a near-photographic memory for clothing. At 95, she can still look at a scrap of something from the second grade and remember what it was a piece of. I think I have a little bit of that. The majority of the stuff that I have in storage, I know and remember. So when I do *Free Sale*, it's really painful and hard. I need to get rid of things because it's not healthy to be a hoarder—but afterwards, I regret everything. Or things come to me when I'm styling something and I can't settle on it. I literally asked my assistant the other day if he remembered who from *Free Sale* took this rubber medical corset that I bought on Havemeyer Street in South Williamsburg in 2000, if not even earlier. And he was like "What? No? Which rubber corset? What are you talking about?"

ASTOLD TO JEPPE UGELVIC

