ROSES OF TIES

MEMORY, GENDER, AND CRAFT AS POST-MIGRATION PRACTICE IN CONTEMPORARY FASHION

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Abstract

Roses of Ties is a socially engaged fashion and craft initiative led by Belarusian-born, Sweden-based artist Ludmila Christeseva, in collaboration with the Women of Artten collective. Initiated in response to the displacement caused by the Russo-Ukrainian war, the project invites women-many of them Ukrainian refugees-to transform donated men's neckties into rose-shaped textile brooches. In this process, a symbol of patriarchal authority is reimagined through acts of feminist care, embodied memory, and shared ritual.
This article explores Roses of Ties as a situated fashion practice that foregrounds gendered resistance, emotional durability, and the politics of making. Drawing on feminist theory, craft studies, and decolonial fashion discourse, the project exemplifies how collective making can function as both healing and political action. By reframing fashion as a site of affective passage, Roses of Ties challenges the extractive logic of fast fashion and offers an alternative vision rooted in joy, care, and transnational solidarity. Here, brooches become living archives — quietly resisting erasure and stitching feminist futurities from grief, displacement, and loss.

Keywords: *Feminist Craft; Affective Resistance; Gendered Labor; Forced Migration; Decolonial Fashion; Emotional; Sustainability; Situated Making; Transnational Solidarity; Fashion and Memory; Slow Fashion.*

Roses of Ties is a socially engaged craft initiative and evolving exhibition led by Belarusian-born, Sweden-based artist Ludmila Christeseva, in collaboration with the Women of Artten collective in Stockholm. Initiated in response to the displacement caused by the Russo-Ukrainian war, the project invites women-many of them Ukrainian refugees-to transform donated men's neckties into rose-shaped textile brooches (Fig. 01). In these quiet, participatory workshops, women stitch, fold, and repurpose an object traditionally associated with patriarchal authority into delicate floral emblems of memory, mourning, and resilience. This project doesn't circulate in galleries alone but lives in bodies, stories, and community. Here, fashion becomes both a vessel of mourning and a method of survival-insisting on sustainability not as trend, but as embodied memory.
For centuries, the necktie has functioned as a potent symbol of control, hierarchy, and masculine professionalism. Originating from the 17th-century cravat worn by Croatian mercenaries, the tie evolved through the tightly knotted styles of the Victorian era into a staple of Western male attire. It became a visual marker of patriarchal order, discipline, and respectability. Worn by generals, bankers, bureaucrats, and corporate executives, the tie communicates authority and conformity within institutional structures. Even today, it remains embedded in gendered dress norms that uphold social order and professional legitimacy (Crane, 2000; Entwistle, 2000; Hollander, 1994).

Fig. 01

The brooch, by contrast, carries a distinct symbolic weight. From ancient Celtic fibulae and Viking cloak pins to Victorian mourning jewelry and suffragette rosettes, brooches have served as both functional fasteners and personal emblems of identity, memory, and resistance. As portable and wearable symbols, they have historically communicated political allegiance, social status, and emotional connection (Arnold, 2001; Pointon, 1999; Riello & McNeil, 2010). While the tie constricts, the brooch reveals. If the tie aligns the body with institutional order, the brooch marks emotional presence-love, grief, and resistance.
Roses of Ties brings these symbolic traditions into dialogue, placing them in tension and ultimately transforming them into a new, collective form.
At the core of this work is the transformation of the tie-not through erasure, but through reworking. The tie isn't discarded; it's folded into something more tender and enduring (Fig. 02 e 03). This echoes Luce Irigaray's theory of mimesis-not imitation, but repetition with a difference.
For Irigaray (1985), mimesis becomes a feminist strategy to occupy dominant forms and subtly shift their meaning. In Roses of Ties, mimesis softens patriarchal power without parodying it.
An accessory once knotted at the neck is now tied to tree branches and carried to the workshop's gathering place, where the ritual of reclamation and reconstruction continues (Fig. 04 e 05). Women gather around the donated collection of ties, each carrying the weight of memories and absence (Fig. 06). In their hands, these remnants of power are reimagined and reshaped through folding, stitching, and crafting (Fig. 07). As they create new forms, their gestures are generative rather than confrontational. The tie, once a symbol of authority, becomes a conduit for care, remembrance, and resilience. What was once worn to mark status is now transformed into roses, worn close to the heart - offering tenderness where there was once distance.
The project opens up a deeply embodied fashion practice, shaped by trauma and sustained through shared solidarity. In workshops across Stockholm, Ukrainian women fold and sew ties once worn by husbands, sons, and fathers-men left behind or lost to war. Through the intimate acts of cutting and stitching, grief is processed collectively. The act of making becomes its own language. These brooches are not merely decorative; they are affective objects, worn close to the skin and imbued with relational meaning. As Parker (1984) and Adamson (2010) argue, craft can serve as a performative medium-materializing memory through gesture, repetition, and form.
Christeseva notes, "ties once symbolized male presence-now they become vessels for remembering absence". Swedish women have joined the project

Fig. 02

too, exchanging ties from deceased partners for rose brooches. This quiet exchange creates a shared emotional economy. The brooch becomes a wearable monument-intimate, public, and deeply felt (Fig. 08).

The labor of craft here is neither pastime nor nostalgia, but what bell hooks (1995) describes as aesthetic resistance-a form of survival enacted through beauty and making. The sewing needle becomes a timekeeper, its motion pacing through the fabric with hope. If fast fashion thrives on speed and disposability, these roses embody what bell hooks calls aesthetic resistance: slowness, care, and survival through beauty. As one of the participants put it, "by transforming ties, we resist and remember; by wearing them close to the heart, we find love and hope".

Importantly, Roses of Ties diverges from market-driven models of circular fashion. While the project reflects Scandinavian upcycling sensibilities, its emphasis isn't on resale or design innovation, but on ritual and repair. Sustainability here is emotional and cultural. The ties are reused, yes-but more crucially, they're reimagined and remembered. Craft, in this context, functions as care work-unpaid, gendered labor rooted in collective memory and transgenerational resilience. The project foregrounds the gendered politics of care labor-a mode of making that resists commodification, reclaims domestic craft, and weaves solidarity among displaced women.

The transformation of grief into hope follows the reworking of a fashion accessory into a work of collective art. The necktie-once a symbol of

Fig. 03

Fig. 04

Fig. 05

Fig. 06

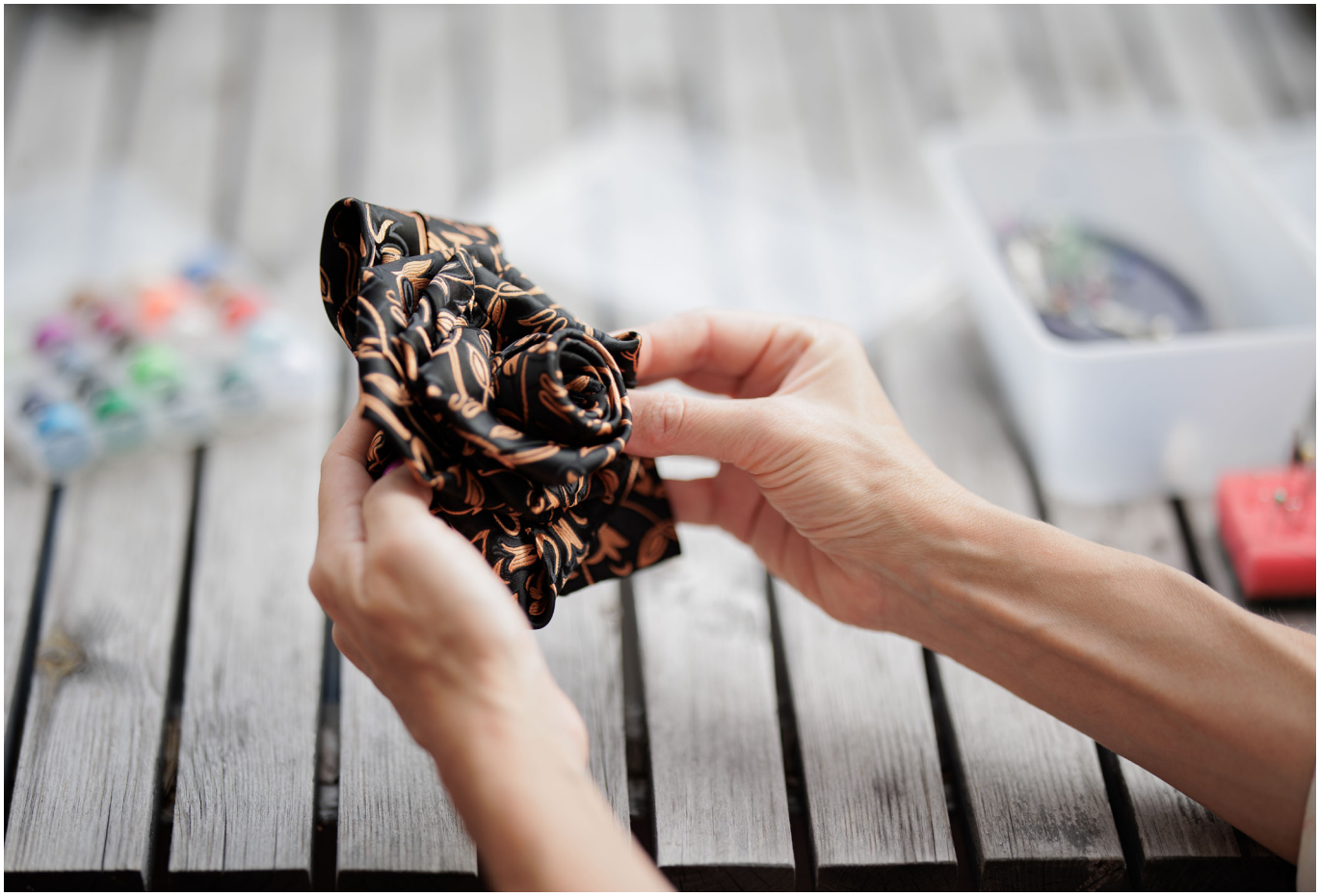

Fig. 07

Fig. 08

patriarchal authority and institutional order-is softened into a rose, layered and hand-stitched with care. This metamorphosis is not merely visual. It signals a shift in meaning: from power to tenderness, from uniformity to uniqueness. Through this gesture, Roses of Ties reclaims fashion as a space for emotional labor and quiet resistance. Unfolding in countless forms, it shapes emotions and memories into rose petals without thorns—offering only care and love. Within its folds, the tie carries memory and presence, filling each moment with tenderness and becoming.

Many of the women in the project come from intergenerational contexts shaped by absence-whether due to war, political repression, or economic migration. Christeseva explains, "in Belarus, where I was born, and Ukraine, where many of the women I work with come from, grandmothers often raised children alone". The brooches become tactile embodiments of this history. They echo the idea of the feminine dowry as a cultural archive, reanimated in the context of forced migration. Fashion, traditionally a Western-coded system of visibility and power, is subverted here by women whose very presence challenges these hegemonies.

By transforming ties into objects carrying personal and collective histories, the women assert knowledge rooted in experience rather than Western fashion hierarchies. In doing so, they enact the pluriversal, situated forms of fashion knowledge called for in decolonial feminist discourse (Haraway, 1988; Jansen, 2020).

The affective force of the project is not only in its materials but in its gestures. As one of participants shared: "gently, carefully, we take down the ties, our fingers tracing the fabric. Hands that once tied them each morning, followed by a quick kiss at the door" (Fig. 09).

Further, the women engaged in the creative transformation of old ties articulate reflections such as: "how can such a small detail hold so much love - yet cause so much pain? It has been two years since my husband did not return from the war. I need something to hold onto". Such details exemplify what Barthes (1981) terms punctum - the piercing element within an object that carries an excess of emotional charge. In this context, the tie becomes a trace, and the brooch becomes testimony.

Each rose embodies a narrative - of fathers remembered, partners lost, and families fragmented by war and exile. Worn close to the heart, it renders both pain and loss visible. The accessories, enhancing the modest attire of their wearers, draw the gaze of passersby and invite questions. These encounters are vital: they open a space where individual stories can be shared while simultaneously enacting collective memory. Through such dialogues, the project continues to bloom - exploring and recording new colours, forms, and memories, and reinforcing the power of presence, care, and remembrance. The polyphonic archive is an attempt to confront the emptiness and loss of our time, where each rose speaks in its own voice yet resonates within a chorus of shared grief and resilience.

According to Professor Elizabeth Wilson, by transforming clothing and accessories, we engage with the persistence of memory, grief, and identity. Wilson (1985) emphasizes that fashion objects are not mere decoration but active mediators of memory and emotional presence. In Roses of Ties, the public visibility of these transformed ties underscores this performative dimension, illustrating how material culture mediates grief, resilience, and communal care.

Though small in scale, Roses of Ties prompts a broader reflection on fashion's role during crisis. In a world increasingly shaped by displacement, war, and systemic erasure, this project insists on fashion as a site of feminist world-making. It resists

Fig. 09

through tenderness, memory, and presence. Its power lies not in spectacle but in quiet insistence. In transforming ties into brooches, the women not only mourn what is lost but find joy in collective making-a radical act of resistance amid erasure. Ultimately, Roses of Ties reimagines what sustainability can mean. It's not only about material use but about emotional durability - the ability of garments to hold grief, transmit care, and remember what is lost. This is not seasonal fashion. It is memorial infrastructure. Through cloth, women stitch continuity from rupture. They resist forgetting. This is not a fashion exhibition in the conventional sense. It's a living archive. The women who make and wear these brooches do not perform fashion-they perform presence. And the ties, reshaped into roses, remind us that even symbols of power can be unknotted, reworked, and worn again-closer this time, to the heart.

In the long term, the vision for this handmade collection of unique accessories is that it will continue to expand and ultimately constitute a grassroots museum of women's resilience—an institution without walls, assembled instead through stories and performative acts, conceptualized as Roses of Ties. As Christeseva reflects, "Do we really need so many flowers?" The question highlights the tension between accumulation and meaning, suggesting that each rose is not merely decorative but a vessel of memory. Much like in Svetlana Alexievich's The Unwomanly Face of War (1985), every rose carries the testimony of mothers, sisters, and daughters, evoking the hardship and emptiness left in the wake of war. Roses of Ties unpacks this depth - a depth that grows with each passing year of war, beyond what words can fully capture, as the participants discovered while transforming men's ties into flowers. Within this framework, Roses of Ties operates at the intersection of ecology and heritage, positioning collective creativity as both a form of resilience and a potential instrument for peace.

CAPTIONS

[Fig. 01] Roses of Ties in women's hands. Photograph: Sebastian von Wachenfeldt.

[Fig. 02] Handmade Rose of Tie. Photograph: Sebastian von Wachenfeldt.

[Fig. 03] Roses of Ties: two different designs. Photograph: Sebastian von Wachenfeldt.

[Fig. 04] The performative ritual of artist Ludmila Christeseva, with ties knotted on tree branches. Photograph: Sebastian von Wachenfeldt.

[Fig. 05] Crafting a Rose of Tie. Photograph: Sebastian von Wachenfeldt.

[Fig. 06] Discussion between visual artist Ludmila Christeseva and Women of Artten. Photograph: Sebastian von Wachenfeldt

[Fig. 07] Crafting a Rose of Tie. Photograph: Sebastian von Wachenfeldt.

[Fig. 08] Presentation of a Rose of Tie. Photograph: Sebastian von Wachenfeldt.

[Fig. 09] Ties knotted on the tree branches. Photograph: Sebastian von Wachenfeldt. Images Photograph: Sebastian von Wachenfeldt

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