

TEXTILE MASKS

THE FABRIC OF IDENTITY. FROM POST-DIGITAL TEXTILE ARTISTIC CREATION TO ART-FASHION AS A TOOL FOR CRITIQUE AND SAFEGUARDING OF INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

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Abstract

This article examines *Textile Masks: The Fabric of Identity*, a series of contemporary textile art artefacts produced by the authors between 2024 and 2025, as a post-digital artistic expression situated within the field of art-fashion and engaged with social critique and the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. The series comprises handcrafted textile objects conceived as sculptural masks, developed through traditional textile techniques—specifically hand stitching and trapunto quilting—in dialogue with post-digital aesthetics. The analysis addresses two typological groups of artefacts: textile objects that incorporate technological components, namely augmented reality, and textile objects that, while materially analogue, critically reflect on processes of digital rematerialisation without embedding technology within the object itself. Drawing on works such as *Synthesis* and selected pieces from the *Textile Masks* series, the article explores how the convergence of textile practices and digital imaginaries generates hybrid artistic forms that challenge the boundaries between the tangible and the virtual. It is argued that these post-digital textile practices renew contemporary visual languages while operating as instruments of cultural critique and as mechanisms for safeguarding intangible heritage by reinscribing ancestral knowledge into contemporary artistic narratives.

Keywords: *Post-digital artist creation; Textile art; Identity; Heritage; Art-Fashion*

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary contexts, textile artistic creation has established itself as a fertile field for the exploration of identity, political, and cultural issues, incorporating languages that intertwine tradition and technological innovation. Far from being limited to formal or decorative concerns, contemporary textile practice has increasingly consolidated itself as a critical territory, capable of intervening in broader debates on memory, cultural diversity, and processes of subjectivation.

This dynamic acquires particular relevance within the post-digital paradigm, a concept that emerged in the early 2010s to describe a critical shift in how the digital is understood and integrated into artistic and cultural practices. As proposed

by Cramer (2013), the term post-digital does not designate a chronological phase following the digital, but rather an aesthetic and cultural condition in which digital technologies are no longer perceived as novelty or rupture, becoming instead a naturalised and structural element of artistic production. Within this framework, post-digital aesthetics are characterised by a renewed emphasis on materiality, manual gesture, and artisanal processes, in dialogue with digital imaginaries, logics, and modes of mediation. Artistic creation thus unfolds in a space of critical coexistence between the tangible and the virtual, where artisanal processes and digital references are articulated to generate hybrid practices that question traditional dichotomies and reconfigure

the relationships between technique, aesthetics, and culture (Cramer, 2013; Pereira, 2018).

In the field of textile art, post-digital practices manifest themselves both through the direct incorporation of digital technologies and through processes of symbolic rematerialisation of the digital in materially analogue objects. Post-digital textile creation is therefore characterised by a productive tension between materiality, manual gesture, and technological mediation, enabling the questioning of dichotomies such as tradition versus innovation or materiality versus immateriality. In this sense, textiles emerge as a privileged medium for critically reflecting on the role of material practices within cultural contexts marked by the pervasive presence of the digital (Dormor, 2020).

It is within this framework that the present article analyses *Textile Masks: The Fabric of Identity*, a series of contemporary textile art artefacts produced by the authors between 2024 and 2025, understood as a post-digital artistic expression situated within the field of art-fashion and engaged with social critique and the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. The series consists of handcrafted textile objects conceived as sculptural masks, developed through traditional textile techniques—namely hand stitching and trapunto quilting—in dialogue with post-digital aesthetics and imaginaries.

The analysis addresses two typological groups of artefacts. On the one hand, it examines textile objects that incorporate technological components, specifically augmented reality and forms of digital interaction, activated through external devices. On the other hand, it considers materially analogue textile objects that, while not embedding technology within the object itself, critically reflect processes of digital rematerialisation at both conceptual and symbolic levels. This typological distinction allows post-digital practice to be understood not as dependent on the constant presence of technology, but as an expanded field of relations between materiality, mediation, and digital culture.

Within the scope of this research, intangible cultural heritage is understood as a set of knowledges, practices, and cultural expressions associated primarily with rural and minority communities and with forms of cultural diversity whose modes of production and transmission are frequently at risk of invisibilisation. These knowledges are articulated in the analysed works

through manual textile techniques, as well as through the use of colour, pattern, and the representation of faces, which function as narrative and symbolic devices for the inscription of identity and cultural memory.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This article adopts a practice-based research approach situated within the field of artistic research, in which creative practice functions simultaneously as a mode of inquiry and as a generator of knowledge. The contribution is grounded in a reflective and critical analysis of the authors' own artistic production, positioning the artworks not merely as illustrative examples but as central epistemic objects through which the theoretical questions under examination are explored and problematised.

The case studies analysed—*Synthesis* and the *Textile Masks: The Fabric of Identity* series—correspond to textile artworks developed by the authors between 2024 and 2025. The selection of these works is intentional and methodological, insofar as they materialise distinct, yet complementary, approaches to post-digital textile creation. Rather than pursuing an external or observational analysis, the article adopts a form of situated critical reflection, in which the authors' dual positioning as artists and researchers is explicitly acknowledged.

Beyond their materiality as artistic objects, the analysed works are also approached through their exhibition dimension. The artefacts have been presented in physical, virtual, and hybrid exhibition contexts, in which the relationship with space, mediation devices, and audience experience plays a central role in the activation of meaning. This exhibition dimension is understood as an integral component of the artistic research process, insofar as it enables reflection on how the objects operate as narrative, sensorial, and critical devices across different modes of presentation and reception.

From a methodological perspective, the analysis combines visual and material examination of the artefacts with theoretical reflection informed by scholarship in post-digital aesthetics, art-fashion, and intangible cultural heritage. This approach aligns with established models of artistic research, in which knowledge emerges through the articulation of practice, theory, and critical self-reflexivity. The aim is not to produce generalisable conclusions, but to contribute to

contemporary debates in art, fashion and post-digital studies by articulating how specific artistic practices can operate as sites of cultural critique and as mechanisms for the symbolic safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage.

TEXTILE ARTISTIC CREATION

The emergence of the post-digital paradigm has profoundly transformed contemporary textile artistic creation, introducing hybrid scenarios in which material practices and digital imaginaries intersect, overlap, and mutually transform one another. Although multifaceted and still the subject of theoretical debate, the concept of the post-digital has become a fundamental interpretative framework for understanding artistic practices that operate at the intersection of material tangibility and digital virtuality (Cramer, 2013; Pereira, 2018; Pereira & Fernandes-Marcos, 2021). Within the field of textile art, post-digital practices do not merely blur material and symbolic boundaries; they also redefine aesthetic experience, authorship, and the role of the audience, opening up new modes of digital rematerialisation, sensorial engagement, and critical intervention in contemporary culture.

The notion of the post-digital originally emerged as a critical response to technological determinism and to the rhetoric of novelty traditionally associated with digital media. As articulated by Cramer (2013), the post-digital is situated at the intersection of digital and analogue cultures, signalling the dissolution of clear boundaries between traditional media and new media. From this perspective, the post-digital does not denote a historical period succeeding the digital, but rather a condition of coexistence in which physical and digital materials interpenetrate, generating hybrid aesthetic languages (Pereira, 2018).

In the textile field, this coexistence manifests itself through processes of rematerialisation, whereby the digital does not replace the material object but instead expands, reframes, and resignifies it. Textile practices operating within a post-digital framework foreground material presence, manual gesture, and embodied knowledge, while simultaneously engaging with forms of digital mediation and interaction. As Dormor (2020) argues, contemporary textiles transcend utilitarian or decorative functions, asserting themselves as discursive and epistemological media in which each stitch may operate as an inscription of memory, a political gesture, and

an aesthetic performance.

REMATERIALISATION AND POST-DIGITAL AESTHETICS

One of the central contributions of the post-digital paradigm lies in its critique of the notion of immateriality traditionally associated with digital culture. Whereas earlier forms of technological modernism privileged virtuality and dematerialisation, post-digital practices signal a renewed engagement with the tangible, the haptic, and sensorial experience (Huhtamo, 2008; Manovich, 2001). In textile art, this shift becomes particularly evident through the creation of artefacts that combine traditional materials and techniques with digital layers, resulting in hybrid objects that extend aesthetic experience beyond purely visual regimes (Pereira & Fernandes-Marcos, 2021).

Post-digital textile rematerialisation encompasses both the physical presence of the artefact and its digital extension, activated through technologies such as augmented reality and forms of digital interaction. In these contexts, the textile object operates simultaneously as a material entity and as an interface for digital inscription, enabling expanded modes of perception and engagement. Artefacts such as *Nature of a Digital Dream* (Pereira & Fernandes-Marcos, 2021) exemplify this dialectic, in which the textile surface functions as a site of symbolic and sensorial convergence between physical and digital dimension (Fig. 01).

Within the framework of post-digital art-fashion (Pereira, 2018), textile creation inherits not only hybrid techniques and materials, but also performative and experiential dimensions traditionally associated with fashion systems. These include theatricality, ephemerality, embodiment, and desire (Lipovetsky, 2016). In this sense, post-digital textile art operates simultaneously as an aesthetic and a critical practice, intervening in collective imaginaries, questioning cultural norms, and proposing alternative modes of aesthetic experience grounded in material engagement and symbolic reflection.

A distinctive feature of post-digital textile practices is their interactive and participatory dimension. In such contexts, audiences are no longer positioned as passive spectators but may become active participants in the aesthetic experience, either through embodied interaction with the artefact or through digital interfaces that enable transformation and reconfiguration. Importantly, interaction is not presented as an end



Fig. 01

in itself, but as a strategy for activating meaning, memory, and critical awareness within the artwork (Pereira & Fernandes-Marcos, 2021).

Post-digital textile aesthetics are thus characterised by hybridity, combining ancestral techniques with contemporary technological mediation to produce artefacts that oscillate between material permanence and digital ephemerality (Cramer & Jandrić, 2021). These artefacts function not only as aesthetic objects, but also as critical devices capable of articulating issues of identity, memory, gender, cultural sustainability, and aesthetic capitalism (Dormor, 2020; Pereira, 2018).

As argued by Pereira and Fernandes-Marcos (2021), post-digital textile art prioritises meaning over formal novelty, creating spaces in which relationships between tradition and innovation, the global and the local, and the human and the technological can be critically examined. This hybrid condition enables post-digital textiles to operate simultaneously as artistic objects, symbolic surfaces, and mediating interfaces.

Beyond their formal and technological characteristics, post-digital art-fashion artefacts

operate as hybrid systems that integrate materiality, embodiment, interaction, and mediation. As noted by Fernandes-Marcos and Pereira (2021), these artefacts do not merely combine traditional textile techniques with digital technologies but activate experiential dimensions such as tangibility, ephemerality, wearability, immersion, and participation. Through haptic engagement and bodily or mediated interaction, they function simultaneously as sensorial objects and discursive surfaces. Within the field of art-fashion, these attributes intensify the capacity of textiles to articulate cultural memory and technological mediation. Post-digital textile art thus emerges as a critical framework through which tradition and innovation are negotiated in relation to identity and cultural sustainability.

TEXTILE MASKS: ANALYSIS OF THE ARTEFACTS

SYNTHESIS: MATERIALITY, AUGMENTED REALITY AND POST-DIGITAL INTERACTION

Synthesis (Fig. 02; Fig. 03) is a post-digital textile artefact composed of two interconnected dimensions: a textile bas-relief panel depicting half of a human face and a digital layer activated through an augmented reality application developed using Meta Spark. The very concept of synthesis that gives the work its title emerges from a process of formal reduction of the human face to its essential lines, seeking to preserve facial expressiveness and recognisability through a minimal set of visual elements.

In the material dimension of the work, these essential facial lines are translated into stitches, which simultaneously assume graphic, structural, and expressive functions. The face was entirely hand-stitched and three-dimensionally modelled using the trapunto quilting technique, a traditional method that creates relief and volume through localised padding between layers of fabric. This technique allows the stitches not only to delineate facial contours but also to shape the volume of the face, articulating surface, depth, and tactility. The manual act of stitching thus becomes a device of formal synthesis and identity construction, in which line, texture, and volume operate in an integrated manner.

Cotton fabrics were used throughout the piece, chosen for their association with textile traditions and for their sensory neutrality. For



Fig. 02

the face, the deliberate choice of white carries symbolic meaning, understood as synthesis, origin, and beginning—the “blank page” upon which identity is inscribed. At the same time, white evokes a strong theatrical dimension, referencing the mime’s mask, a figure that conveys emotion and narrative through gesture, expression, and silence. This theatrical reference becomes particularly relevant as the mask is subsequently “worn” by the public through social media platforms.

The augmented reality component is accessed via social media, allowing audiences to use the artwork as a filter applied to their own images. By activating the filter, participants can photograph or record themselves with the virtual mask, which adapts to their faces and to different facial expressions. This dynamic adaptation introduces a performative and participatory dimension, in which the audience does not merely observe the work but temporarily embodies it within their own physical and digital identities.

Following this activation, participants may share their own version of the artwork on digital platforms, reinscribing *Synthesis* within networked circuits of circulation and extending the aesthetic experience into online space. Augmented reality thus functions not as an autonomous or dominant element, but as a relational extension of the textile object, activating processes of co-creation, mediation, and the multiplication of meaning.

In this sense, *Synthesis* exemplifies a post-digital approach in which technology does not replace textile materiality but critically expands it. The work articulates manual gesture, traditional technique, formal synthesis, and digital interaction, reinforcing the primacy of material presence while simultaneously proposing new modes of engagement, recognition, and sharing. The relationship between the physical object and its digital extension enables an exploration of identity, visibility, and performativity within a cultural context profoundly shaped by technological mediation.

This artefact was exhibited at Figures-International Exhibition, CICA Museum, South Korea, and Reflections of the Past, Visions of Tomorrow, Cista Arts Gallery, London.

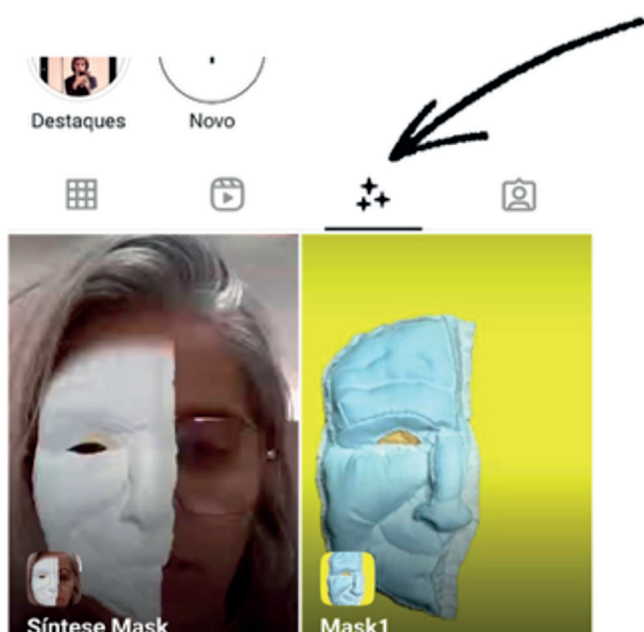


Fig. 03

TEXTILE MASKS: THE FABRIC OF IDENTITY: REMATERIALIZATION, IDENTITY AND ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE

The series *Textile Masks: The Fabric of Identity* (Fig. 04) consists of a set of sculptural textile objects that suggest only fragments of human faces. Rather than presenting complete faces, the works reveal partial elements—eyes, cheekbones, lines of the mouth—that evoke expressions of fatigue, restraint, and weariness. This fragmentation of the face plays a central role in the series, operating as a metaphor for contemporary identity as incomplete, multiple, and unstable.

The objects are made of wool felt, a material chosen for its sensory and symbolic qualities. The texture of the felt—simultaneously warm, porous, and imperfect—stands in contrast to industrial or technologically polished surfaces, reinforcing an aesthetic of vulnerability and imperfection. The colour palette comprises skin tones, oranges, and greys, evoking bodily diversity, emotional ambiguity, and psychological states associated with physical and emotional exhaustion. The textile material, in close proximity to the body,

intensifies the affective dimension of the works, establishing a direct relationship between skin, fabric, and memory.

Unlike *Synthesis*, this series does not incorporate embedded digital technology or interactive devices. Its inscription within the post-digital field is articulated through processes of symbolic and critical rematerialisation. The textile masks function as a material reflection on contemporary digital culture, particularly on mechanisms of avatarisation, filtering, and performative self-presentation associated with social media platforms. In this context, the textile mask emerges as a counterpoint to the glamour and idealised aesthetics of *Instagrammable* life, exposing a quieter, more fatigued, and less polished dimension of contemporary subjectivity.

The use of the mask as a form directly references the multiple social and digital masks individuals adopt in networked environments. Just as digital filters reshape, smooth, and transform faces on social media, these textile masks physically materialise the notion of filtered and mediated identity. However, in contrast to the digital logic of perfection and visual seduction, the masks foreground failure, wear, and incompleteness, asserting a critical stance towards dominant regimes of visibility and performativity in digital culture.

These artefacts assert themselves as a living homage to ancestral textile traditions, reactivating them through a contemporary perspective that honours the past while simultaneously projecting it into the future. This approach is rooted in a profound recognition of the symbolic, social, and cultural value embedded in manual skills transmitted across generations. Through the reactivation of traditional textile techniques and embodied knowledge, the series positions making as a form of cultural continuity and resistance within a rapidly dematerialising technological landscape.

The masks are produced at dimensions close to those of the human face, allowing audiences to touch them and place them over their own faces in an analogue manner. This possibility of physical use does not transform the works into utilitarian or spectacular performance objects but rather introduces a crucial experiential and relational dimension. By wearing the mask physically, participants are invited to confront the materiality of the object—its weight, texture,



Fig. 04

and proximity to the skin—activating a sensorial experience that stands in sharp contrast to the immaterial mediation of digital identities.

The textile techniques employed—namely hand stitching and *trapunto quilting*—enable the three-dimensional modelling of facial fragments, creating volume and expressivity through manual gesture. These techniques, associated with ancestral knowledge and intergenerationally transmitted practices, reinforce the embodied dimension of the works and their connection to forms of intangible cultural heritage often linked to rural, communal, and minority contexts. Manual making thus becomes a gesture of resistance against acceleration, dematerialisation, and cultural homogenisation.

The series has been presented in physical exhibition contexts, including the solo exhibition *Woven Realities: Bridging Threads and Pixels* at Cista Arts Gallery, London, and *Fresh Legs 2025* at Inselgalerie, Berlin. In these settings, the works were activated as sensorial sculptural objects, inviting proximity, contemplation, and critical reflection.

Taken together, *Synthesis* and *Textile Masks: The Fabric of Identity* articulate two complementary approaches to post-digital textile practice, revealing how the post-digital condition can be critically explored both through the incorporation of digital technologies and through their deliberate absence. While *Synthesis* mobilises augmented reality as an interactive extension of a materially grounded textile object, *Textile Masks* translates concerns associated with digital culture—such as fragmentation, filtering, and avatarisation—into analogue, tactile forms. This dual strategy demonstrates that post-digital artistic creation is not defined by technology itself, but by a critical awareness of how digital logics shape contemporary subjectivities, identities, and modes of representation.

Within the field of art-fashion, both artefacts operate at the intersection of textile sculpture, bodily extension, and symbolic surface. *Synthesis* foregrounds performativity and networked circulation, allowing the textile mask to be temporarily embodied, transformed, and redistributed through social media platforms. In contrast, *Textile Masks: The Fabric of Identity* privileges physical proximity, wearability, and sensorial engagement, inviting the public to encounter the mask through touch and analogue

interaction. In both cases, the textile object functions as a mediating interface between body, identity, and cultural discourse, situating art-fashion as a hybrid practice that exceeds conventional distinctions between art object, fashion artefact, and technological interface.

Finally, both works reaffirm the relevance of textile materiality and manual knowledge within contemporary artistic practice. Through techniques such as hand stitching and *trapunto quilting*, the artefacts reinscribe ancestral textile skills into present-day visual languages, positioning making as a form of cultural continuity and resistance. Whether extended through augmented reality or activated through analogue use, the textile mask emerges as a critical device that negotiates visibility, identity, and memory in a post-digital context. Together, these artefacts demonstrate how post-digital art-fashion can operate as a site of aesthetic experimentation, cultural critique, and symbolic safeguarding, grounding contemporary concerns in embodied, material, and historically situated practices.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article has demonstrated that post-digital textile artistic creation constitutes a critical field for aesthetic experimentation, cultural inquiry, and the active safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. Through the practice-based analysis of *Synthesis* and the *Textile Masks: The Fabric of Identity* series, the study shows that textile artefacts can operate as symbolic and experiential surfaces where identity, memory, and cultural negotiation are materially articulated.

A key contribution lies in clarifying that post-digital textile practice is not defined solely by the presence of digital technologies, but by a critical engagement with the cultural conditions shaped by digital environments. While *Synthesis* employs augmented reality as an interactive extension of a textile object, the *Textile Masks* series explores post-digital aesthetics through analogue rematerialisation, translating logics of fragmentation and avatarisation into embodied forms. This distinction demonstrates the conceptual breadth of post-digital aesthetics.

Within this framework, art-fashion is positioned as a critical category through which textile artefacts function as bodily extensions, performative interfaces, and discursive devices. At the same time, the reactivation of manual techniques such as hand stitching and *trapunto*

quilting affirms textile practice as a form of symbolic safeguarding, ensuring the transmission of embodied knowledge through transformation rather than preservation. Taken together, these findings position post-digital textile art and art-fashion as multidimensional practices that articulate materiality, mediation, and cultural memory within contemporary global contexts

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CAPTIONS

[Fig. 01] Pereira (2019). Nature of a Digital Dream. Exhibition Artrooms Roma 2019 – International Contemporary Art Fair for Independent Artists, 22–24 July 2019, Rome, Italy. Courtesy of the authors.

[Fig. 02] Pereira (2024). Synthesis. Exhibition Figures – International Exhibition, CICA Museum, South Korea. Courtesy of the authors.

[Fig. 03] Pereira (2024). Synthesis – Augmented Reality application, available on Instagram and Facebook. Courtesy of the authors.

[Fig. 04] Pereira (2025). Textile Masks: The Fabric of Identity III. Courtesy of the authors.

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