

Return to Earth

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Every life has an ending, and for humans this is a heavily contemplated advent. However, even with the existing sustainable options for burials, the materials that that body is clothed in are not often considered. It is estimated that 65% of all fibres used in the clothing industry are made from synthetic material¹. Long after a body has decomposed these materials remain in the ground and take hundreds of years to break down, releasing harmful chemicals in the process. Using the slow and thoughtful process of embroidery, I have designed textiles for burial-wear with fabric that is eco-friendly to produce and 100% decomposable, such as plant and animal-based materials and natural dyes.

Bio-degradable matter, once dead and decomposing, adds nutrients to the ground which allows for new life to grow. This life cycle closely connects people to nature and provides the visuals for my design. I have drawn from disintegrated leaves as a reminder of our place in the environment, one that we must look after for the next generations in the cycle. Some of the techniques and materials used are inspired by traditional Irish crafts and the ancient burial rituals of my predecessors.

Textiles have great significance within society, throughout history and across cultures; they tell stories, provide warmth and comfort and play an important role in specific occasions and rituals. New life is often accompanied by textiles, the swaddling blanket helps the baby feel safe and contained as it adjusts to life outside the womb. The same is sometimes done with the deceased; as a salve, a cover, for remembrance and memorial. My project aims to open the discussion around death and the rituals and practices that surround it. With beautiful, thoughtful textiles in natural materials we can return loved ones to the earth with ceremony that has aligns with the balance of nature.

¹ <https://www.commonobjective.co/article/what-are-our-clothes-made-from>