ELEGANT CONFINEMENT AND MATERIAL MOURNING:
AN EXPLORATION OF FASHION, FETISH, MATERIALISM,
RESTRICTION AND CONFINEMENT

CREATIVE PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS

BY

MADONNA ANN KILBORN

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
MUNCIE, INDIANA

DECEMBER 2011
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Elegant Confinement focused on creating a series of wearable sculptures that confine the body, as well as restrict movement. A primary objective was to explore the fashions, fetishisms and confinements of the Victorian era, by examining the role restrictions, strict mourning codes and body manipulation that upper class women endured. This body of work also addresses first wave feminism and the Industrial Revolution, and how all these substantial changes have strongly impacted contemporary society. Victorian gates, fences, under-garments and accessories have influenced the forms of the sculptural adornments. Each sculpture, created by brazing together industrial steel parts, hinges open and then closes to cage the body. Elegant Confinement is accompanied with Material Mourning a series of jewelry pieces inspired by Victorian mourning jewelry, as well as Berlin Iron Jewellery created with similar parts.
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CHAPTER ONE

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The inspiration for this creative project began with my fascination with the fashions and role restrictions of upper-class women in the Victorian era. The lavish and elegant, yet cumbersome, over-done and confining attire was a reflection of women’s position in society, their strict placement in the domestic sphere, and the binding moral codes of conduct that they had to abide by. One might question, what it would be like to endure these common placed bounds, and how have these past social norms effected the current societal conditions?

The Victorian era was a time of invention and rapid growth. The innovations of the Industrial Revolution birthed the modern world. As mass commercial production grows, so does society’s desire for excess material goods. If this era of innovation had not occurred would our planet escape the hindrance of pollution and over consumption? Would the advance in science, medicine and the standard of living have evolved to the conditions of today? Would women in western cultures be considered equal to men? Would equality for all people regardless of gender, race, age or sexual preference be as important or prevalent in our society?
The goal of this project was to create a series of sculptural adornments, which address confining social ideologies, materialisms and fetishes of both the past and the present by making wearable sculptures that cage the body and restrict movement.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF INFLUENCES

ELEGANT CONFINEMENT INFLUENCES

The sculptures in *Elegant Confinement* are an embodiment of a diverse set of influences. Many of the prevalent influences come from the historical Victorian period, a time of substantial change. The Victorian influences have a diverse range from the clothing to the social conditions tolerated in the era. Another prominent influence is iron fences and gates, things that have been used to protect as well as cage throughout history in many cultures. All the influences have been combined to help convey both past and contemporary fashion, fetishism and issues of social injustices.

VICTORIAN ATTIRE

One of the most prevailing Victorian influences is woman’s attire, particularly under-garments and accessories (Appendix A). While exploring Victorian fashion, one cannot ignore the most ubiquitous yet hidden clothing article, the corset. In the Victorian era most women wore corsets. A corset gave a woman a more idealized hourglass shape by confining the ribs and waist. The boning on corsets, typically made from the bones of whales, elephants or moose, was very strong and hindered movement of the torso and
abdomen. Some women had ‘tight-lacing’ fetishes, and would subject themselves to constant tightening of the corset and even sleep in their corsets to achieve the “ideal” 18-inch waist size.

The corset was a symbol of Victorian eroticism. “From Casanova to Freud, experts in sexual psychology have testified to the erotic attraction of concealment. By delaying the sight of the naked body, clothing arouses sexual curiosity, holding in to promise the thrill of exposure” (The Corset 450). There is much debate whether the act of corseting was a fashion tool of male oppression, or a female act of liberation. Many affiliate corseting with rib crushing pain brought on by men so that their idealized view of female figure was met. Others believe that ‘tight-lacing’ corseting allowed for sexual freedom. Tight-lacing restricted the abdomen and prevented growth, therefore tight-lace corseting was used as birth control (Kunzle 35).

“The popular perception of the nineteenth century focuses on the idea of sexual repression, and it is widely assumed the Victorian sexual ‘prudery’ spawned myriad hypocritical perversions” (Fetish 96). Though women’s bosoms and bottoms were accentuated in Victorian dresses, it was deemed inappropriate for a woman to show any of her legs or feet. Due to this oppression, another Victorian article of clothing that also caused sexual arousal was the shoe. Many men were aroused just from the glimpse of the leg and foot, it is believed that during the Victorian era that foot fetishes where widespread. In today’s society, both the corset and shoes, particularly high-heels and boots, are still viewed as sexualized clothing items.
WOMEN’S ROLES

While exploring the fashions of the Victorian era, one becomes intrigued with the social role restrictions, especially those placed on elite Victorian women. In general, the woman’s place was in the home. It was her domain and it was her duty to keep it running properly, women were not to be ‘troubled’ with worldly affairs. As the social rank of women elevated, the more social restrictions where placed on her.

VICTORIAN MOURNING

Aristocratic Victorian England was a society engulfed with severe codes, morals and laws. One of the most prominent codes was that of mourning. Only the wealthy could follow the strictest mourning codes, the poor could not afford the required dress. In the beginning stages of mourning all black attire was required, this included jewelry. Where a widow could go or where she could be seen was limited. At a wedding, a woman in mourning had to stay in the back corner of the room, and out of the bride’s sight (Brett 100). Mourning codes were far more severe for women than they were for men.

INDUSTRY

Mass production and materialism also influences Elegant Confinement. The era known as the Industrial Revolution began in 1760 and lasted a century, it brought about many technological advances in agriculture, metal and textile manufacturing, and transportation. These significant advancements lead to the economic policies and the social structure of England. The Industrial Revolution’s innovations also led to a better quality living standard for most people. Wealth from industry and commercial enterprises began to change the social structure of England. The middle class was
beginning to grow and the upper class no longer consisted of simple hereditary aristocracy. Victorian England flourished with industry and mass-production. The Victorian era marks the beginning of what we know as the Modern Times.

WOMEN’S SUFFERAGE MOVEMENT

Even though there was a changing structure for classes, women were considered property and had few rights. Women were officially prohibited from voting in the United Kingdom when it was documented in the 1832 Reform Act. Women’s rights had been a political topic before and after 1832, however in 1872 it became a national movement when the National Society for Women’s Suffrage was founded. Even though there was a great deal of effort in the movement, it would be over thirty-years before any significant progress was made. Women’s lives in Victorian England where strongly dictated by men.

WROUGHT AND CAST IRON

Other prevalent influences on Elegant Confinement are iron gates, fences and cages. Man invented fencing for protection, to keep things out and to keep things confined. When and where fences began to be used in civilization is unknown. It is also a mystery as to where and when iron began to be used in fencing and gates. The earliest remaining evidence of wrought ironwork used for architectural purposes dates back to the twelfth century. More than likely, iron was used in fencing and gates before then. However, due to the easy weathering of iron, and the possibility of it being melted down to suit the demands of a new era, no earlier artifacts have been found.

The earliest wrought iron fences were created to protect churches. There are also several early examples of wrought iron doors in tabernacles. C-scrolls and S-scrolls
were the most common design motifs in the beginning of iron fencing, and continue to today (Appendix B). In the fourteenth century, wrought iron grating began to be used to protect the windows of churches. During the Gothic period, wrought ironwork began to be utilized for railing in cathedral stairways. Also in the Gothic period, wrought iron fences began to be used to protect tombs.

During the Baroque and Rococo periods wrought ironwork was at its height. Wrought ironwork was found in abundance in fencing, gates, doors, window bars, stairways, balconies and fountain grating throughout Europe, all serving the purpose of protecting life and property. In Spain the bars on women’s window grates were extremely close together. This was to protect the man’s property as well as give only a small glimpse of the world to the woman. During the Baroque and Rococo times, the more respectable the woman the more isolated from the world she was (Buar-Heinhold 20). In France most of the wrought iron stairway railing was melted down for weapons and ammunition during the French revolution (Buar-Heinhold 22).

Before the Renaissance little is known about the artisans who designed or the blacksmiths who created the wrought ironworks. This is mostly because the work created for churches was made for God, not self-interest. During the Baroque period independents were seeking designers and blacksmiths to create wrought ironworks for their homes and business. At this time, artisans began to sign or stamp their designs as well as their ironwork.

The Industrial Revolution brought about many technological changes to ironworking. Cast iron quickly replaced the hand-worked wrought iron. Cast iron
fencing was being produced in factories and it was used in abundance, especially in London and Paris.

_Elegant Confinement_ uses Victorian fashions and social ideologies to address contemporary issues of body image, sexual and material fetishes, industry and over-consumption. These issues have been cultural problems throughout history, however they began to occur in abundance in the Victorian era and continue to grow today. Many of these limiting, restrictive and overwhelming issues lure us into as well as influence current social ideologies. These sculptures express these notions using the fence and gate references to articulate the feeling of confinement and restriction by caging the body. Though many issues of repression have been alleviated in western society since the Victorian era, they have not been improved on a global scale.

**MATERIAL MOURNING INFLUENCES**

_Material Mourning_ is a body of jewelry pieces that accompanies _Elegant Confinement_, however it is not as politically or conceptually driven. _Material Mourning_ is jewelry about jewelry. Like _Elegant Confinement_, _Material Mourning_ utilizes Victorian fashions and iron gates as an influence, but predominately explores trends in historical and contemporary jewelry (Appendix C).

**VICTORIAN JEWELRY**

In nineteenth century England, Victorian jewelry was a complex embodiment of design, symbolism and sentiment. It was often worn as an emblem of love, marriage, friendship or death. Victorian mourning jewelry or _memento mori_ was used to honor the dead. Victorian mourning jewelry was often made from jet a coal-like, carbonized black substance formed by heat, pressure, and a chemical reaction on ancient driftwood (Dawes
123). Jet looks very similar to black glass, however it is easily carved and was used to produce intricately designed jewelry pieces. The all black surface of jet made it ideal for the early stages of mourning. When Prince Albert died in 1861, Queen Victoria would only allow jet jewelry to be worn in her court during her long period of severe mourning (Muller 14).

**BERLIN IRON JEWELLERY**

Berlin Iron Jewellery became popular in the early nineteenth century during the Napoleonic Wars (1813-15). Germany asked its wealthy citizens to contribute their precious jewels and gems to the war effort. For their contribution, the patrons were given iron jewelry that was inscribed with the German phrase “Gold gab ich fur Eisen 1813,” which translates to English as “I gave gold for iron” (Dawes 110). Germany’s aristocratic women wore their new jewelry as a symbol of pride. Gold one of Napoleon’s most prized possessions, ironically lead to his demise. Berlin Iron Jewellery’s popularity did not end after the war. It was desired as mourning jewelry in Germany, as well as England and France. Berlin Iron Jewelry often resembled miniature iron gates and fences. Berlin Iron Jewellery was made from cast iron finished with a lacquer finish, which blacked the iron.

**STEAMPUNK JEWELRY**

Steampunk is a contemporary artistic trend influenced by Victorian innovation and idealism transformed into a modern counter-culture. “The key allure and goal of Steampunk is to fashion and inhabit a world where the awe and romance inspired humanity’s pursuit of scientific knowledge is reflected in our tools, furniture, architecture, literature, art and fashions. The mode is both a celebration of the past and of
what might yet be, a witty commentary on things lost and paths not taken” (Campbell 7).

Often, Steampunk jewelry resembles broken relics of the past with a touch of contemporary style.

While *Material Mourning* is an observation of Victorian jewelry design, it is most like Berlin Iron Jewellery because it is a statement about material and value. Exploration in new materials has been ongoing trend in post-modern jewelry, however due to current global economic conditions the cost of precious metals has increased at a rapid pace making material alternatives even more appealing. Also, multiples and production work are in larger demand that one-of-kind, original and unique jewelry pieces. Perhaps handcrafted jewelry is a slowly dying art form, bound to be replaced with machine produced adornments.
CHAPTER THREE
DESCRIPTION OF THE ARTWORKS

ELEGANT CONFINEMENT

The prominent body of work, Elegant Confinement is a series of sculptures made to adorn the body. It consists of a corset, a hat and a pair of boots made from various small industrial parts. All of the forms of these sculptures are influenced by Victorian attire. Iron fences and mass-production influenced the choice of materials. Iron gates and elegant Victorian fabric patterns inspired the surface design patterns.

The steel industrial parts used to create the artworks are 1/8 inch rod, 1/4 inch tubing, internal retaining rings, e-clips, schnorr washers, external tooth lock washers, internal tooth lock washers, slotted hex nuts, brass-plated acorn nuts, 20 gauge wire and stainless braided sleeve (listed in order of abundance used).

The wearable sculptures in Elegant Confinement began by taking the steel rod and creating a frame in the form of the inspiring garment. After cutting and bending the rods, they were put together with brazing rod, bronze rod normally used to weld bronze sculptures together. A jeweler’s mini-touch was used for the heating process. After the frames had been fabricated, patterns were created out of internal retaining rings and e-
clips to resemble the common C-scroll patterns found in fencing and gates. The patterns also look like the delicate fabric designs found on Victorian garments. Once the patterns were laid out, they were brazed together with 1/8 inch pieces of brazing rod that had been placed between the parts. After all the parts had been joined they created a large flat piece that resembles a pierced sheet of metal. Then the flat surfaces were bent and placed in the open parts of the frame. They were then brazed to the rod frame and all excess material was cut off. Other types of parts were sometimes added as decorative elements. Once all the interior pieces were brazed to the frame the structure was complete. The sculptures were then cut into two separate pieces then small sections of steel tubing were brazed to each part to create a hinge connecting the halves. The final finished sculpture would hinge open and then close to cage the body.
The first piece in the Elegant Confinement series is Confining Corset, a wearable corset that confines the body and restricts movement of the torso. It is twenty-four inches tall, eighteen inches wide and thirteen inches deep. The majority of the sculpture is composed of 1 1/2 inch internal retaining rings arranged in different patterns. The brazed together internal retaining rings make up the front and back panels of the piece. Around the hip area, smaller 5/8-inch e-clips complete the panels. Internal retaining rings, e-clips and external tooth lock washers assembled in two different lace-like patterns line top and bottom edges of the corset. Eight feet of stainless braided sleeve, weave in and out of
schnorr washers attached to the internal retaining rings, lacing up the back of the corset. There are also two bows in the front by the hip area made from the braided sleeve. Acting as buttons, there are several brass-plated acorn nuts arranged down the front of the corset. Once the acorn nuts are removed, the corset hinges open at the sides so that it can be placed on the body. Then the front of the corset shuts and the acorn nuts are replaced, locking the corset shut and caging the body.

Influenced by several different Victorian corsets, Confining Corset was designed to cover and confine more of the female body than a traditional corset. It goes higher up the back and covers some of the shoulder blades. It also is much longer in the lower front and back. This corset was designed to fit the typical woman’s figure in the twenty-first century. It has a twenty-seven inch waist, not the common twenty inch corseted waist of the Victorian era. The hip area in Confining Corset is exaggerated to give the impression of the typical hourglass figure of the Victorian Era.

The patterns created by the brazed industrial parts resemble the delicate lace fabric patterns of corsets, as well as appearing similar to the C-scroll patterns found in iron fencing. Once the corset is placed on the body it cages the wearer, restricting movement and comfort. Confining Corset was created to reflect the body manipulation that women endured to achieve their society’s view of beauty, and to question how today’s society is still negatively affected by ideologies of beauty.
Also in the *Elegant Confinement* series is *Confining Mourning Bonnet*, a wearable hat that confines the head and restricts most movement of the neck. It is twenty inches tall, nine inches wide and nine inches deep. The wire frame was made from threaded rod in this sculpture. The part of the hat that nestles over the head is made of 5/8-inch e-clips. The veil that hinges down over the face is made from alternating schnorr washers and external tooth lock washers. The bottom of the veil is lined with a row of internal lock washers above a row of a lace like pattern made of internal retaining rings, e-clips and external tooth lock washers. There is a bow form that comes down from the hat and
hinges open and closed to attach the hat to the head. It is made of alternating internal tooth lock washers and schnorr washers. On the top back of the bonnet are three flower forms, a large flower in the middle and a smaller one on each side. The flowers are made of internal retaining rings, e-clips and external tooth lock washers. There are four threaded rods coming out of the middle of the large flower. At the tops of the threaded rods are the brass-plated acorn nuts. There is only one acorn nut coming out of the smaller flowers. Under the flowers are two bows with long ribbons coming down the back made from the braided sleeve.

Several different Victorian hats influenced *Confining Mourning Bonnet*. It is designed to cage the head, to feel confined and trapped behind the veil. It is a reflection of the strict mourning codes of the Victorian era. The mourning codes for women in the Victorian era where severe, especially in the early stages of mourning. Women where required to wear all black for a certain period of time depending on their relationship to the departed. At a funeral they would be required to wear a long black veil.
CONFINING BOOTS

The final sculpture in the Elegant Confinement series is Confining Boots a pair of wearable boots that confine the legs and restrict movement by making it impossible to walk. Each boot is twenty inches tall, 7 inches wide and 9 inches deep. The majority of the boots are composed of 3/4-inch internal retaining rings arranged in different patterns. The brazed together internal retaining rings makeup the front and back panels of the sculpture. The area around the foot is made from smaller 5/8-inch e-clips. Internal retaining rings, e-clips and external tooth lock washers assembled in a lace-like pattern, which lines the top of the boots. In the front there are small bows made from the braided
sleeve. Acorn nuts act as buttons that complete the outer side of the boot. In the same manner as *Confining Corset*, when the acorn nuts are removed the boots can hinge open to allow the leg and foot to be placed inside.

Different pairs of Victorian era woman’s boots and shoes influenced *Confining Boots*, however the choice to design them as knee-highs was influenced by contemporary boot trends. Shoe and foot fetishes were common in the Victorian era because women were not allowed to show their feet. Shoe fetishes are still the most common fetishes in contemporary society, especially the high heel.
MATERIAL MOURNING

The secondary body of work, *Material Mourning* is a jewelry suite that includes a necklace, a bracelet, a ring, a brooch, a cloak-pin and a pair of earrings, as well as a series of corsage brooches all created by assembling steel industrial parts. All the designs of the jewelry pieces are influenced by Victorian mourning jewelry, Berlin Iron Jewellery inspired the use of steel as material, and the contemporary counter culture movement Steampunk, influences the choice to assemble found objects. The jewelry pieces in *Material Mourning: Jewelry Suite* are created by arranging industrial parts in patterns that resemble Victorian jewelry, then soldering the parts together with silver solder. The *Corsage Brooch* series was created as a study for the flower forms on *Confining Mourning Bonnet*. The corsages are made by connecting the industrial parts with brazing rod, in the same fashion they are connected in the *Elegant Confinement* Series.
MATERIAL MOURNING: JEWELRY SUITE
The necklace, bracelet, brooch and cloak-pin in *Material Mourning Jewelry Suite* are made from internal retaining rings, schnorr washers, external tooth lock washers and 20-gauge wire that is made into jump rings. Each is created by soldering four washers together creating a diamond like form with two layers of three internal retaining rings coming off opposite ends. The other set of opposite ends of the diamond form have partial external tooth lock washers soldered on them. These individual units are joined together by linking internal retaining rings and external tooth lock washers with jump rings. The earrings in this series are made in a similar pattern, however instead of a diamond cluster of schnorr washers there is only a single washer. The earrings also have 4-gauge sterling silver wire that goes through the ear. The ring in the suite is a cluster of schnorr washers with only partial external tooth lock washers on one pair of opposite ends. The ring also has a sterling silver band.
There are three brooches in *Material Mourning: Corsage Brooches*. The largest one is the same as the flower forms on the back of the *Confining Mourning Bonnet*, one large flower form with a smaller flower form on each side. The other two brooches are an identical pair with just the large flower form.
The Victorian era, a time of rapid growth and change, lead the way for the modern world. There has been a great deal of progress made in social freedoms and liberties in western civilizations over the last century, yet there are still many social inequalities that are waiting to be met globally. Materialism and body image obsession plague society, and mass industry has lead to over-consumption and hazardous environmental concerns. The evolution of science and development has lead to higher standards of living in First World nations, while Third World counties endure a downward spiral.

The issues of social injustices, body image, sexuality, materialism and over-consumption may always be problems in every society. I hope that this body of work helps the viewer question these problems by pondering their effects on current social conditions by exploring the consequences they have had on past and contemporary societies globally. I hope the viewer can evaluate their personal bounds and freedoms. What things might confine them? What choices may perhaps liberate them? What choices
can we make that might alleviate some of these issues for future generations?

The concept for this body of work began with *Restricted* a Victorian collar sculpture I made from steel washers, and evolved over a two-year time span through various artworks made of different materials ranging from steel keys to sterling silver (Appendix D). The actual work for *Elegant Confinement* and *Material Mourning* was made in a productive six-month period.

Though I enjoyed watching each individual piece take form, discovering the odd social standards and the social hierarchies of the not so distant past has left a lasting mark in my consciousness. My exploration of historical social ideologies and their impacts on contemporary society calls into question the societal choices made today and the effects they have on the future. Overall, seeing all the artwork complete and shown together in the Atrium Gallery in the Art and Journalism Building on the Ball State University Campus brought a wonderful feeling of accomplishment.
ELEGANT CONFINEMENT AND MATERIAL MOURNING

*Elegant Confinement* is a series of wearable sculptures made from industrial parts that explores fashion, fetish, materialism, restriction and confinement. Influenced by Victorian gates, fences, under-garments and accessories, each piece hinges open, and then closes to cage the body. While on the body, these sculptures constrict movement and comfort to reflect on the overwhelming impact of industry, materialism and “ideal” image. This body of work is companioned with *Material Mourning* a suite of jewelry, inspired by Victorian mourning jewelry, and Berlin Iron Jewellery.

This body of work evolved from my fascination with Victorian fashion, role restrictions, body manipulation, first wave feminism, the Industrial Revolution and how these substantial social changes have strongly impacted contemporary society. Without the push for women’s rights during the Victorian era and the continuation of equal rights for all, there might still be severe confining and limiting gender and race role restrictions in our society. Without the birth of the Industrial Revolution our planet might have escaped the pollution and over consumption, but advances in the standard of living would
not have been developed. With this series, I want to challenge the viewer to assess the past and explore the positive and negative impacts that these changes have had on our society, as well as how these social changes are impacting other societies globally.
WORKS CITED


ADDITIONAL READINGS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS


All images where photographed by Serena Nancarrow.
APPENDIX A:

VISUAL EXAMPLES OF VICTORIAN ATTIRE

VICTORIAN CORSETS

Image Source:

VICTORIAN HATS

Image Source:

VICTORIAN SHOES

Image Source:


APPENDIX B:

VISUAL EXAMPLES OF INFLUENTIAL JEWELRY

VICTORIAN MOURNING JEWELRY

Image Source:

BERLIN IRON JEWELLERY

Image Source:
STREAMPUNK JEWELRY

Image Source:
APPENDIX C:

VISUAL EXAMPLES OF IRON FENCES AND GATES

Image Source:

APPENDIX D:

VISUAL EXAMPLES OF PAST SCUPTRAL ARTWORKS

*Insecurity for the Secure* Chest, 2009. Welded flat steel keys & brass keys 10” x 9” x 7”

*Restricted* Victorian Collar Sculpture, 2008. Welded steel washers 14” x 11” x 8”
*Carriage Dress* Bracelet, 2010. Sterling silver & andesine laborite 11” x 6” x 6”

*Morning Dress: Lingerie* Bracelet, 2010. Sterling silver & andesine laborite 9” x 4” x 4”
APPENDIX E:

SUPPLIER INFORMATION

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