The studio's inheritance is stark and under no illusions. There is no cultural context shielded from absurd economics, no working distinction between art and commerce. Economical thinking is the contradiction at the heart of the work. The studio aspires to be efficient, to leverage readymade formats and repeatable design protocols, but it cannot allow itself simply to be led down the decision-making path of least resistance.

The unfulfilled, totally normalising visions of twentieth-century design are computerised now. The ultimate, elusive artefacts of mainstream modernism are produced quite easily, by default. Digital workflows and the relative technical autonomy of the contemporary designer liberate form from the treachery of intermediaries in historical divisions of labour. While its predecessors were kept busy negotiating with technicians and fabricators (simply to achieve accuracy before the computer was arduous), now the studio capitalises on a surplus energy.

This energy is directed toward escalation. The studio aspires not to formal ends, but rather it leverages the economisation of form. Form is a readymade, a receptacle to be imbued. The studio has overcome the banal platitudes of interdisciplinarity, arriving at a practice in which the multiplicitous, digital-physical objects and events of contemporary design can be intelligently orchestrated. There are no distinct media, nor disciplines, only discourses. Discourses which draw on specific cultural literacies, rather than specific skillsets and materialised techniques. Craft remains essential, but it is put at the disposal of conceptual outlooks. Graphic design's primitives – text and image – open onto spatial design, performance, distribution, encounter, and collectivity.

The studio knowingly inherits the economical page, a skeuomorphic complex of computerised techniques for automating historical typographic craft. Modernism's formal language is a thing that can be applied. Its standard formats, its reductive sense-making, its design protocols attuned to the factory and the imperatives of mass production are taken for granted. The studio considers the essential components of the economical page to be beyond reproach. Modernism repeated its bogus, eurocentric claim to cultural universality until it did, in fact, become universal. Now, the utter pervasiveness of modernism's formal precepts makes them, counter-intuitively, scarce. Few visual codes have achieved such saturation. The studio channels this rarefied ubiquity.

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D) Roster

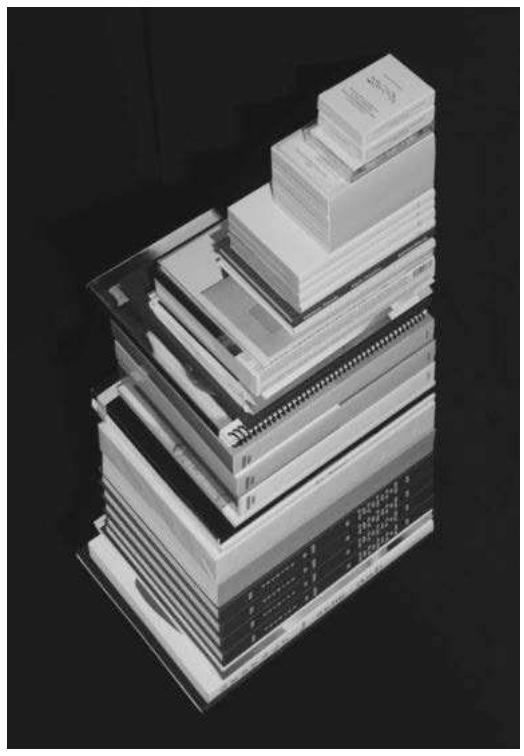
A section of the studio library is given over to conceptual artists books published in the 1960s and 1970s. Modest yet covetable volumes, white covers tending to yellow. Titles in black sans-serif type, all capitals, centred. When these books were published, the traditional, illustrated art catalogue was a sales document. A witless container for photographs of the product.

An artistic opportunity thus emerged to appropriate publishing resources for art. To propose that art publishing not only document and commodify art, but make more, and more distributed, art. As an artwork, the artists book was pure conceptual labour. Its design – often produced at the typewriter – was nondescript, never elaborate. The *aesthetics of administration*, it has been called. Naturally, capital came to appreciate this impulse to subvert a market. Self-consciously cheap, multiple, ephemeral, and portable, eventually artists books became scarce and desirable. *Out of print* is the ultimate secondary market paratext.

The colophons of these canonical conceptual artists books are typically minimal, but all-encompassing: *Conceived, edited, designed, printed, and distributed by the artist.*

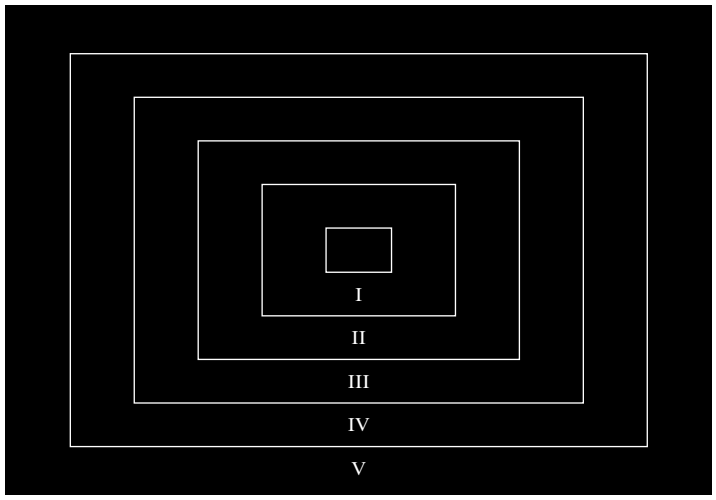
This formulation expresses not just a model of autonomous, economical publishing practice, but also a sense-making artistic proposition that acts on and orchestrates its processes, entangling them with its content. The reflexive impulse of these artists books still resonates.

In mainstream publishing, the poetics of the colophon are reduced to joyless accounts of a book's technical specifications and standardised copyright disclaimers. Designed in Europe, printed in Asia, shipped to the USA (for further piecemeal national and international distribution). A kind of disinterest pervades these obligatory disclosures, concealing the excesses of globalised supply chains behind vaguely exoticised notions of quality and expedience. These are accounts of projects led helplessly around by economical thinking. The gesture of publishing is compromised. The potential of global collaboration dissolved.



13

The Dutch printer Gheraert Leeu was a colophon artist. They visited Venice in 1482 or 1483, bringing back a number of fine Venetian typefaces to their workshop in Gouda. One of the first books that they printed on their return, proudly displaying these new types, was 'The Travels of Sir John Mandeville', a twelfth century account of its eponymous protagonist's journeys in the Near East. The colophon to this edition is itself a kind of (fictionalised) travel writing, in which Leeu falsely claims that the book was printed in Venice. What was the point of such a trivial



I Design the Project, II Design the Object(s), III Design the Representation, IV Design the Distribution, V Design the Mediation

deception? Apparently Leeu was thrilled by the fantastical prospect of a travel book, printed by a traveller, while traveling, using the spoils of their travels.

The Leeuian colophon is an essential part of the studio's imaginary. It is not a list but a roster. A roster of materials, processes, and protagonists, assembled deliberately and with narrative intent. Each contributor – technical or artistic – brings connotation, reputation, affiliation. Their names are significant graphic objects in the composition of the page.

Confronted with mainstream publishing's inopportune divisions of labour, in which book-making expertise is disconnected and agency is conceded to de-skilled coordinators and institutional protocols, the studio finds itself obliged to intervene. The studio is at the centre of a network of practices, literacies, and technological capabilities which enable it to outperform conventional publishing models, by virtue of its contact with collaborators, content, format, resources, production, distribution, and remediation. In asserting this holistic position, the studio adapts the all-encompassing role which defined the production of the artists book.

Institutional publishing attempts to script design. A low resolution photograph of the artwork comes accompanied by a protocol stipulating that it not be altered, cropped, or overlaid. Its caption is embedded in the image file. Colour reference charts are included as aids to its controlled and accurate reproduction. The high-resolution files are retained by the institution. A contract stipulates that the designer will concede control of the digital design document before production begins. Design is reduced to layout. Collaboration, production and distribution are deferred.

To sign the standard contract, to use the approved supplier, to position the placeholder image, is to work according to layers of institutional indirection that withhold the possibilities of holistic design decision-making. Possibilities withheld not to be manifested by the institution, but to be squandered, compromised, dissolved for the sake of routine or economy. The studio conceives a publishing project which surreptitiously reunites institutional resources arbitrarily divided between design, production, distribution, and marketing. Publishing is again made subject to artistic decision-making.

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I) Asset

The studio would design, print, bind, and distribute a book just for its assets. Just to insert them into a project as a repository for future moves, secured with the authoritativeness of print.



21

The artist, like an oracle, prompts a sequence of moves.

Bulging fruit straining a translucent grocery bag. That would be an asset.



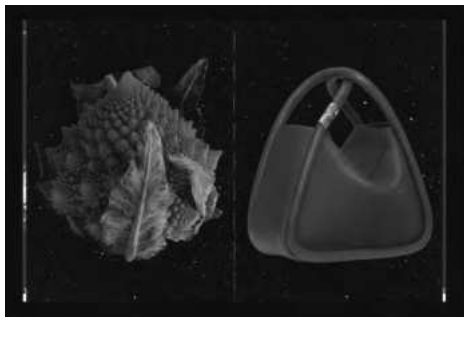
22

Simple, repeatable distortion effect applied to the brand's name. Asset.



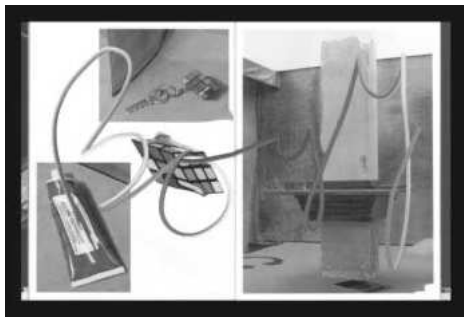
23

Lapis blue fractal Romanesco, prasine green Charentais, suspended in starry space. Those are assets.

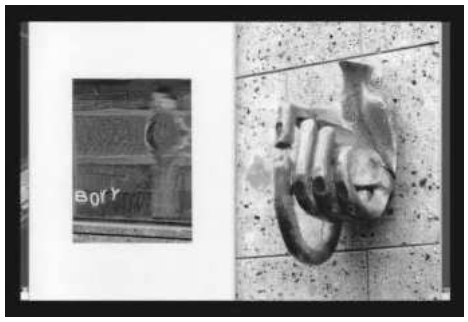


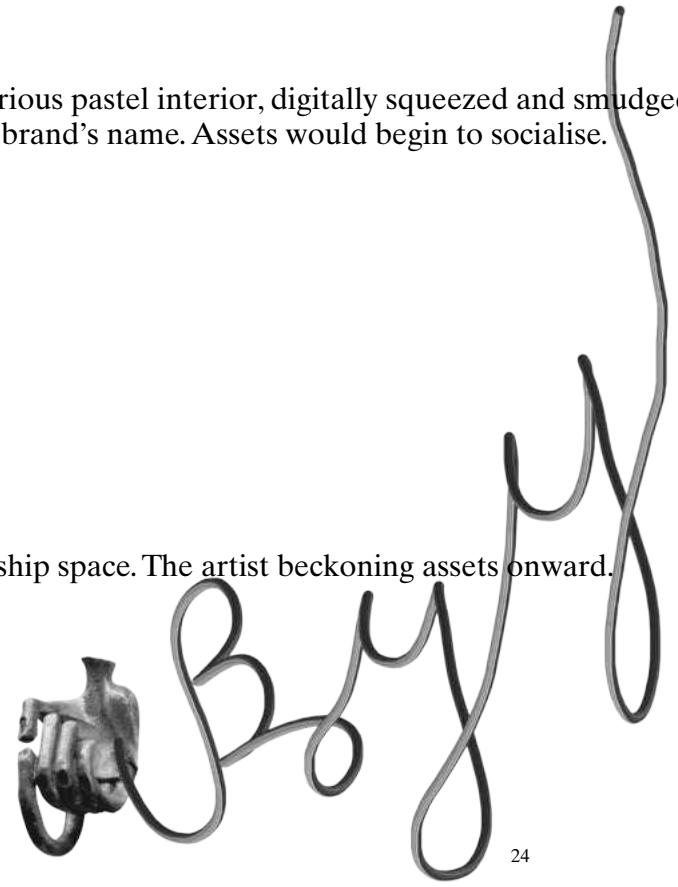


Tube of toothpaste photographed in the artist's delirious pastel interior, digitally squeezed and smudged by the studio into a looping stroke which writes the brand's name. Assets would begin to socialise.



Sculpture installed on the facade of the brand's flagship space. The artist beckoning assets onward.





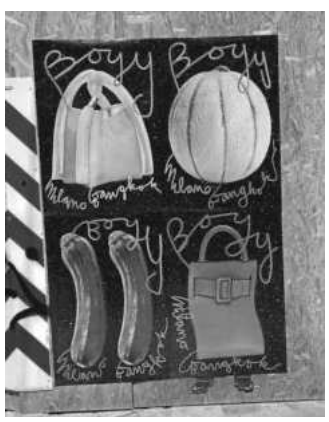
24

The brand extending the looping stroke which writes its name, in wire, as the arm of a pair of sunglasses.



25

The artist's prasine green Charentais in starry graphic space meets the studio's digitally smudged looping stroke which writes the name (...)



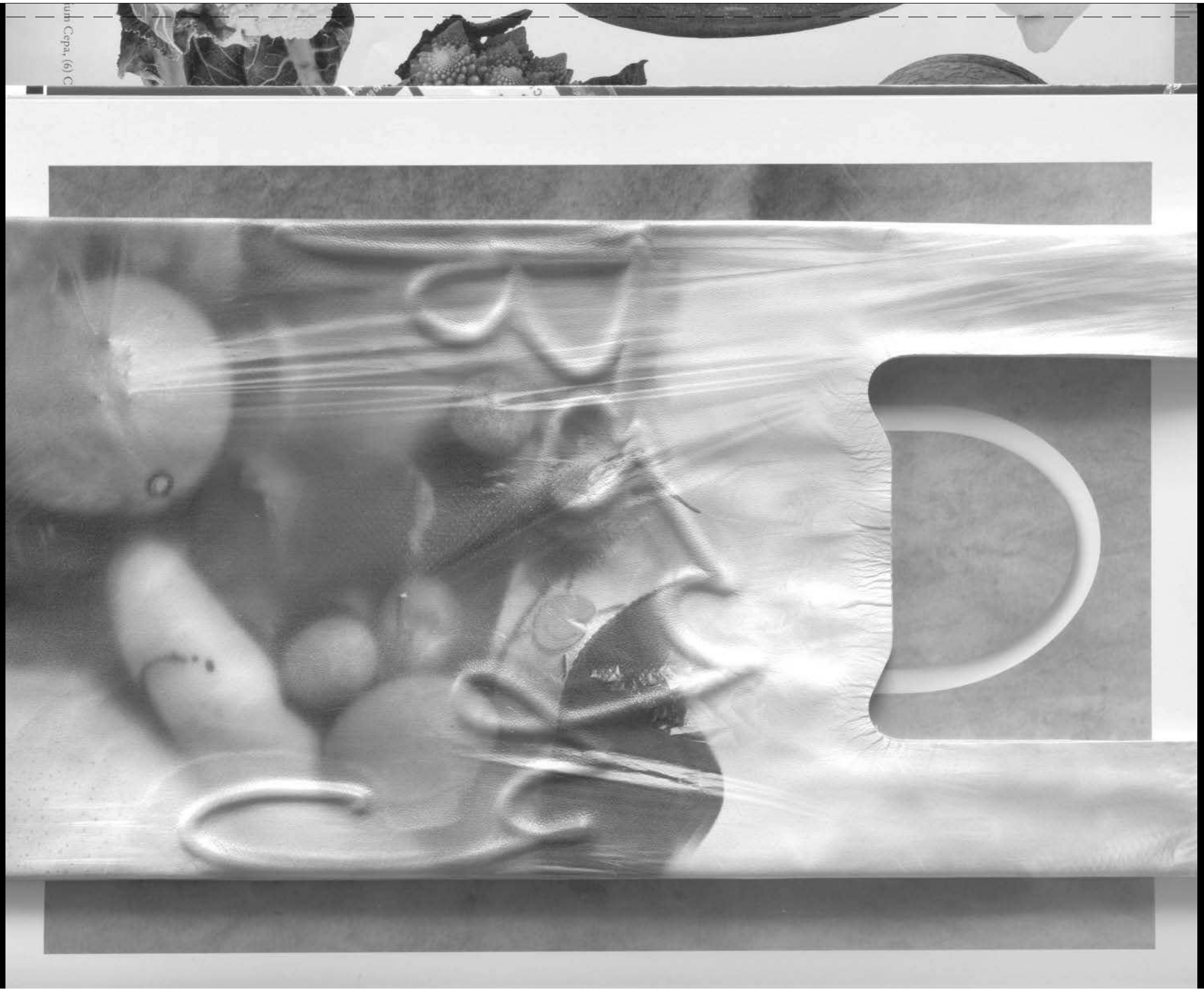
26

(...) and is printed – by the brand – on a silk shall and photographed – by the studio – being worn by a model who holds, as a prop, a pair of sunglasses whose arm writes the name in a looping stroke of wire.



27

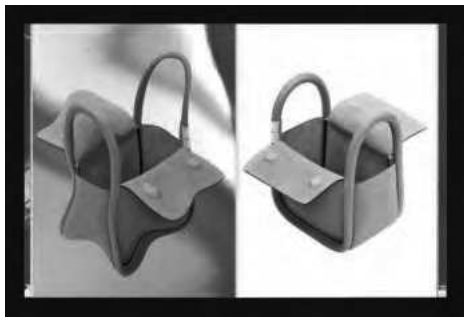
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(Above) Plastic Bag with Fruits, Boyy, 2023

29.11.24 10:59

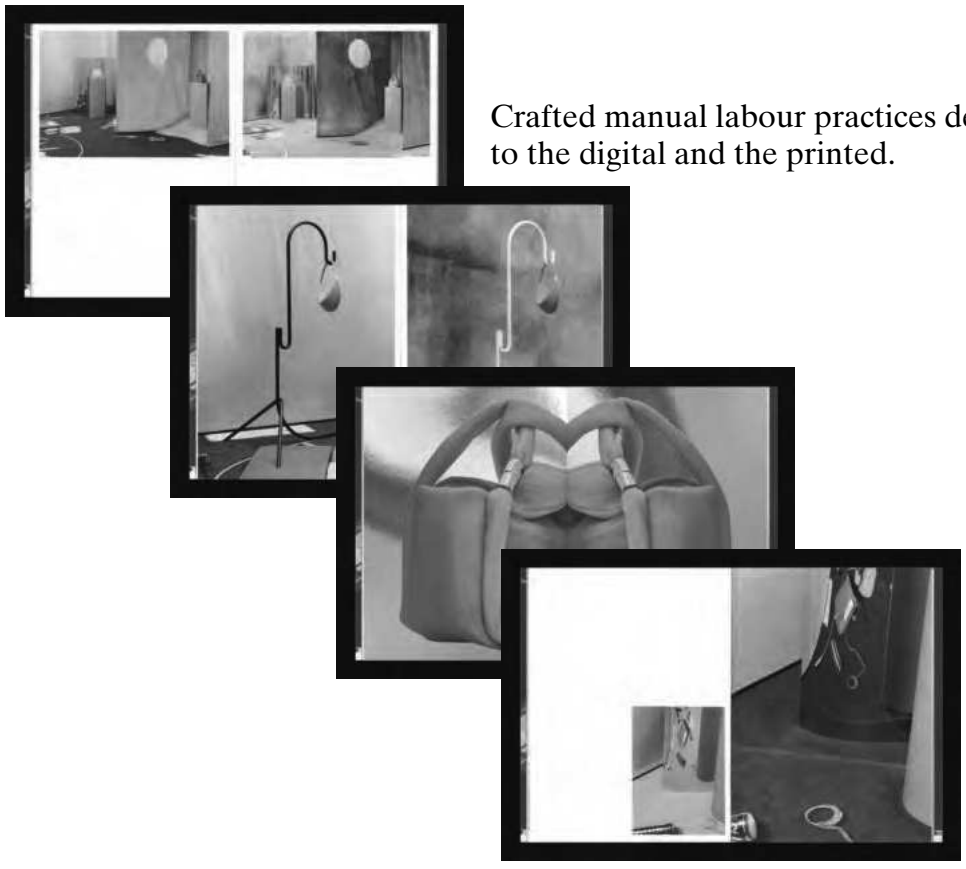
The brand's *Bobby Soft* SKU in Teal, photographed and puckered and bloated by the studio as an image asset and printed in a brand book (...)



(...) and put back into production by the brand as a puckered and bloated object now, and photographed again by the studio as a puckered and bloated object to be printed as an image in a brand book.



Printed doubles stack up at the end of the press in a spectacular concentration of materials.



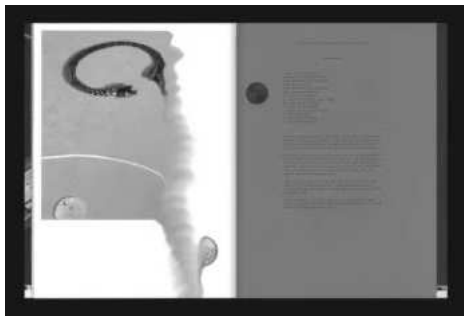
Crafted manual labour practices deviant doubling in tribute to the digital and the printed.

Assets double (...)



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The book object itself would have anticipated its regeneration in the form of assets.



Its delirious pastel endpaper would become a packaging material.

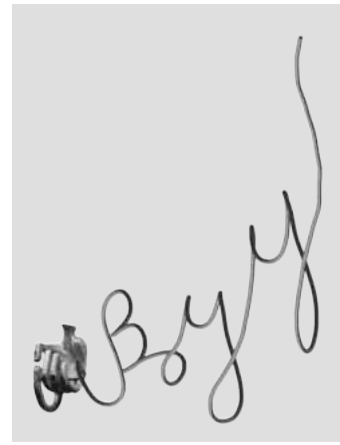


That looping stroke would become the logo, inevitably.





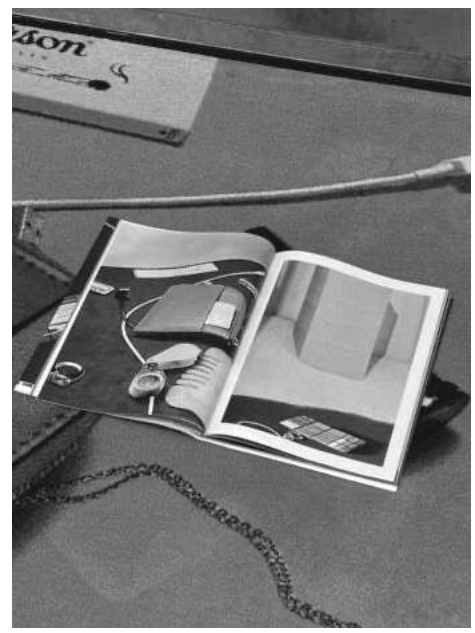




(...) and redouble and double back.



The book would be photographed as a prop in the interior it documents.



Print anticipates image which anticipates object,
which anticipates space, anticipates image, anticipates print,
which anticipates object which anticipated print.

One sequence of moves would prompt another.



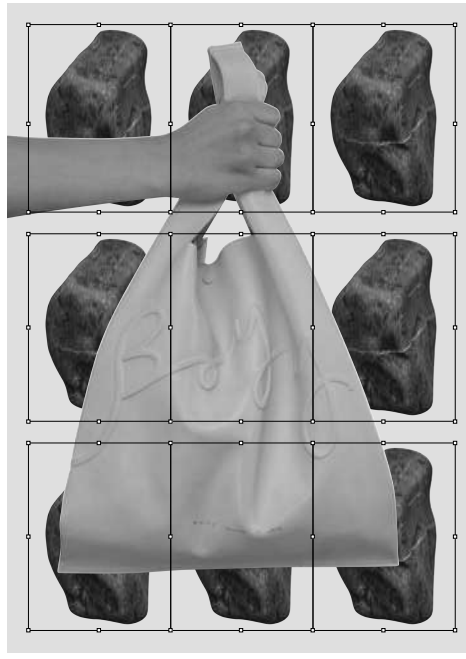


29

Every move now

inviting the artist, inviting the studio, inviting the brand,

to react.



Naturally they would reproduce:
splitting in two, spawning versions of themselves as they are passed between the artist, the studio, and the brand.

30





Beetle, rock, plumbing:



pre-selected, pre-packaged, prepared to be coaxed from graphic space into object space, into print space, into image space.

Digital doubles spawn instantaneously and unconscionably across the network.



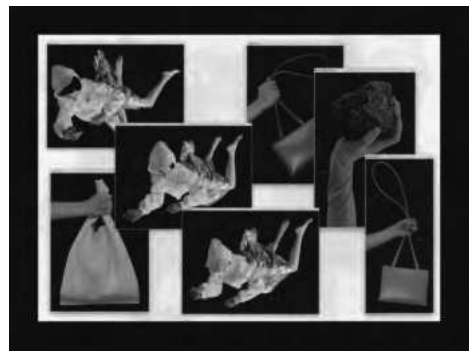




31

The intermediate space of the design document is put on display, revealed as the breeding ground for assets.







There they are duplicated, exported, versioned, matched with no finality in view.

32



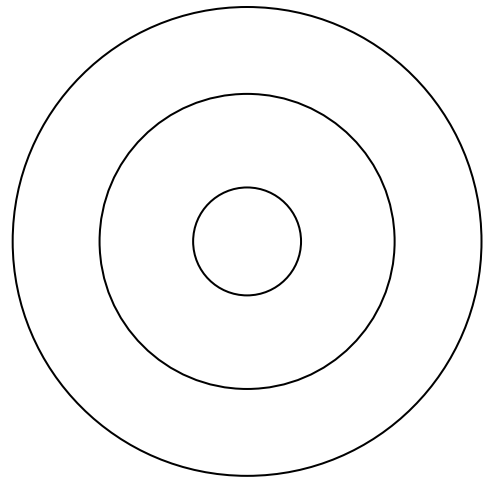




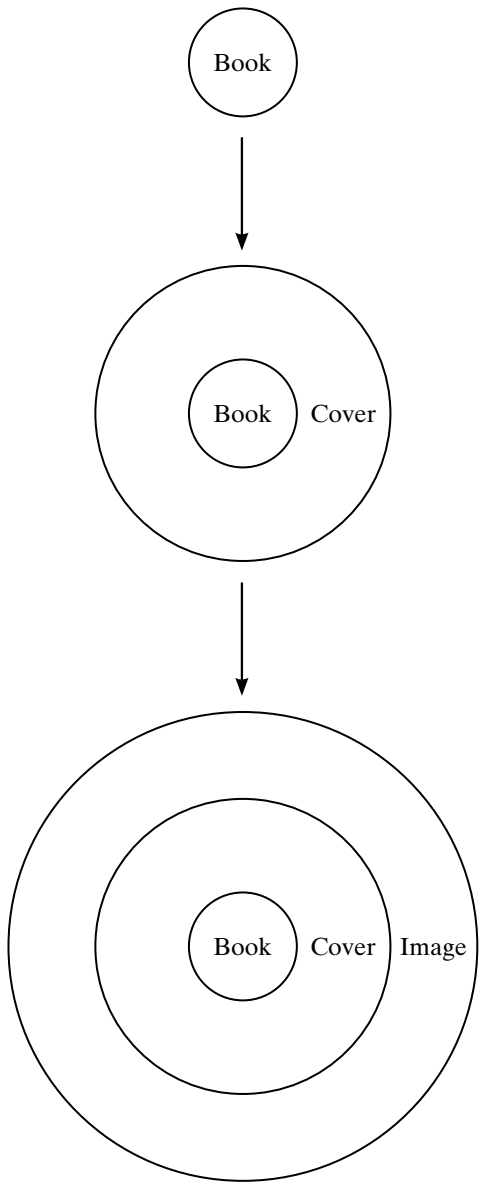


P) Counterparts

The design of contemporary media does not end with form and materiality, but projects out into virtual worlds of visuality and cultural connotation that must also be brought into existence and designed.



Hundreds of years after the invention of printing in Europe, publishers had still not arrived at the notion of a singular design for the whole edition of a book, including cover and binding. Books were sold as unbound sheets, without printed covers. The external appearance of a single copy was ultimately determined by the buyer's specifications, finished to match the other books in the library where it was to be kept. The culture in which the book would be designed as a unified editorial, graphic, and industrial object – an object prepared to be multiplied and commodified – was still to emerge.



Not an appendage, image is now another surface of the designed object. It constitutes that object as much as paper, ink, and binding. As much, even, as roster and content. Now materiality must fulfil image. Image projects – promises – the highest standards of manufacture and continues to act on the material object even after it is encountered in the hand.

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It would first be seen like this:

82

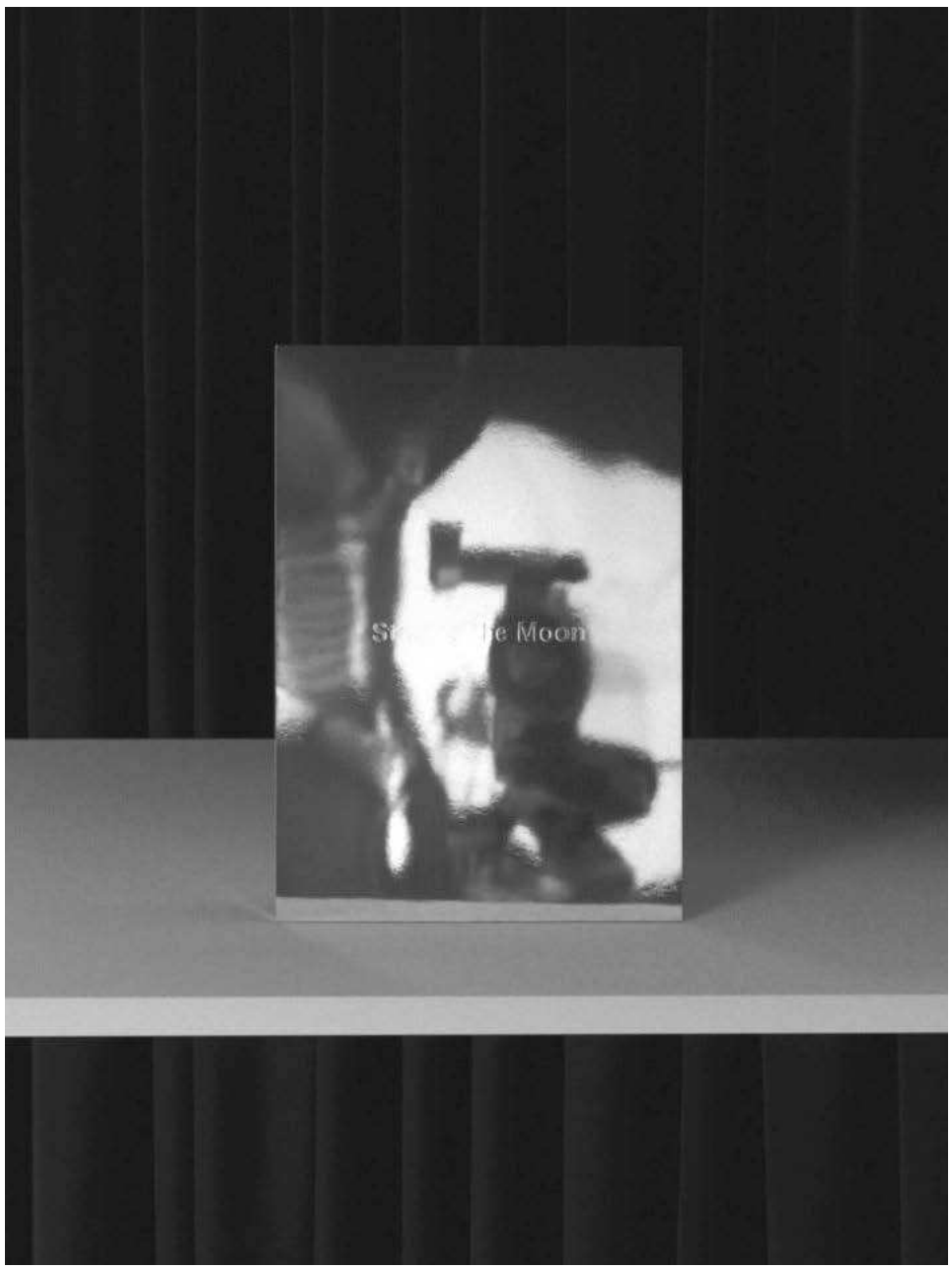


Layers of remediation are provided for. The camera's reflection shimmering on its surface. Screens, frames, and compositions placed around it. The object is conjured into a hyper-photographic realm in which its own ambience anticipates it.

Image pre-produces materiality. Materiality is designed to image. Which came first will not really be apparent.

It is not a marketing image. Marketing happens after objects. Marketing pictures objects as it supposes the audience would want to see them.

This image pictures the object as it sees itself.



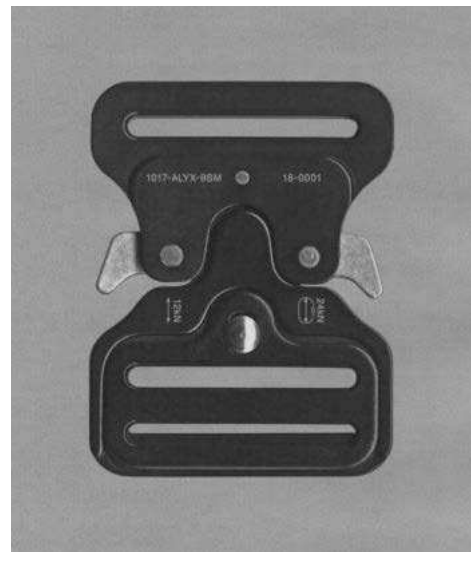
This image is an elemental aspect of the object.

This image is part of the object's specification, of a piece with its materials and processes.

The image and the object reciprocate each other. No object can be enough without its image counterpart.

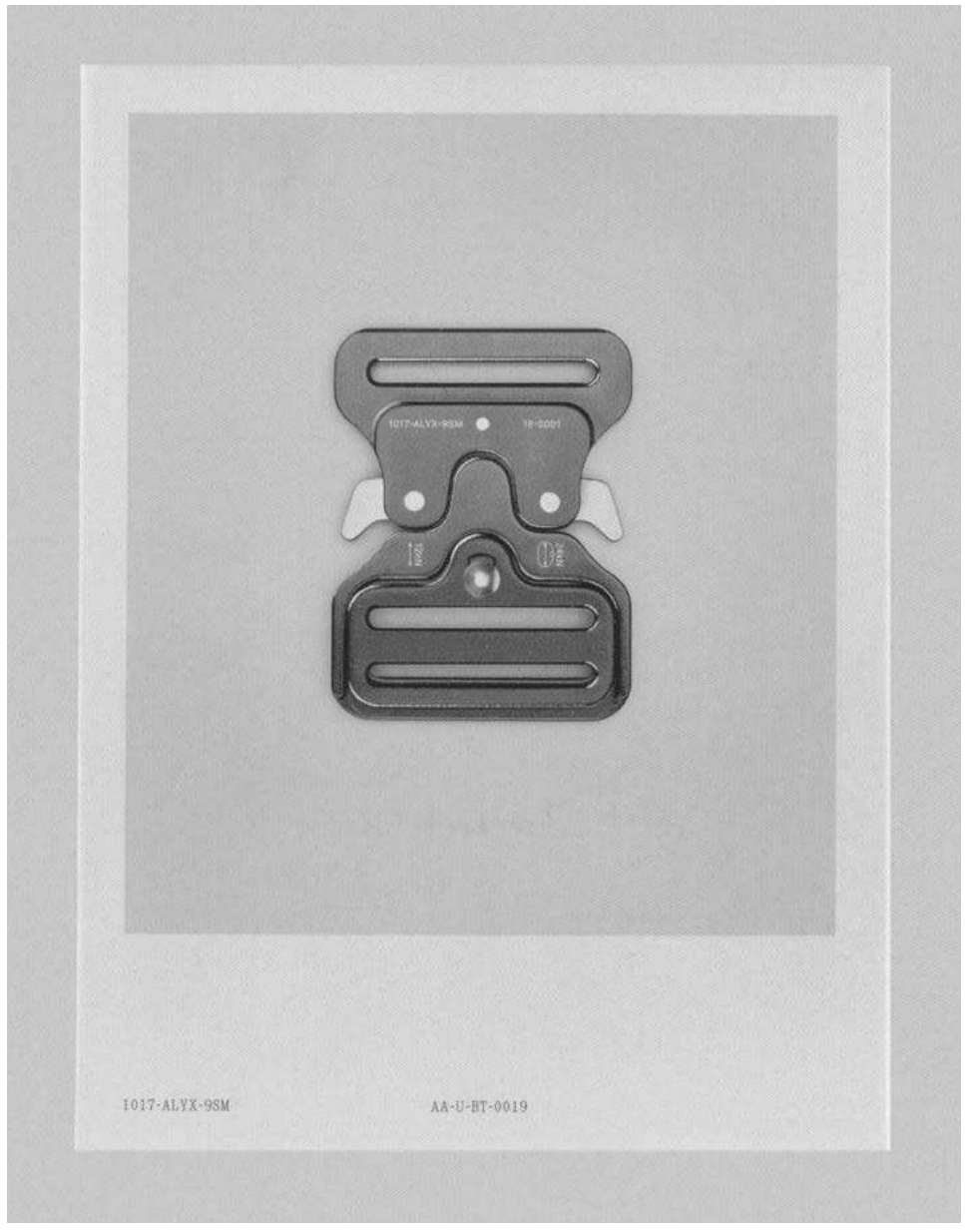
U) Obviousness as Affect

This is just a label. Text printed on a hardware buckle. All capitals. Aligned to the edges of the type area. Like it was the only option. Done at the factory. As if the text is just typed into the console of a machine and it comes out like that. Industrial. As found. Nothing to say about it.



Its matter-of-factness means to position it completely beyond the mentality of designing as a compositional activity. Beyond sketching. Beyond trying it larger, smaller; aligning it here, there; styling it like this, like that. It posits obviousness as an asset. Its decision-making pretends to be outsourced to manufacture. Its design aspires to be sublimated into production.

This is just self-evident. A box printed with a picture of its contents. The box contains a hardware buckle with a text label printed on it. It pictures that hardware buckle so as to correspond to its size and position within the box.

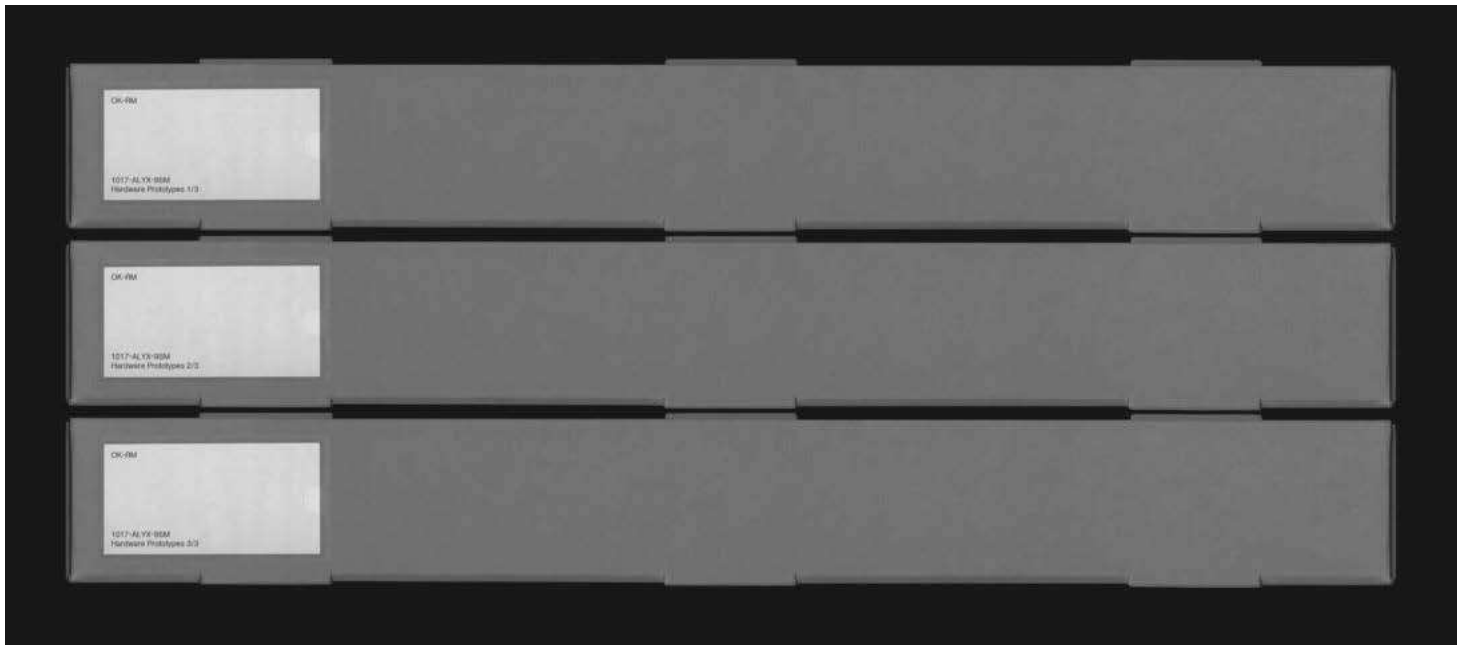


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It would take more effort of reasoning to do absolutely anything but that. Anything but that would be redundant. It is photographed so as to re-enter the design process as an asset. Not documentation. Not output. *Throughput*. The description of the object, the object itself, and the photograph of the object.

throughput,
throughput,
throughput.

Obviousness skims like a stone over deep water.



Beneath the surface, obviousness is continually rehearsed.
Archive folders containing clear acrylic sleeves with pockets. Sample labels. To be sewn into garments.



First one: black text centred in all capitals.
92% polyamide, 8% kevlar. Off-white. Looks perfect.
Inevitable. Presumably it is by way of a well-refined
standard that it came out like that. Optimal.
Can't question it.



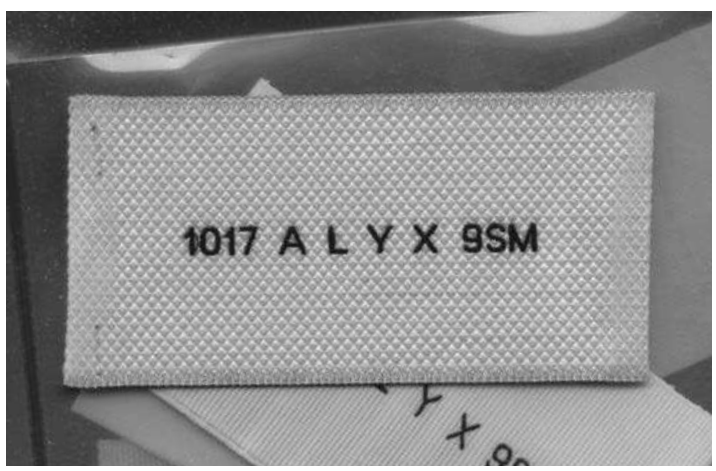
Second one: black text centred in all capitals.
57% cotton, 43% polyamide. Off-white.
Looks perfect. Has a rightness. A gravity.



Third one: just black text centred in all
capitals. 46% polyamide, 54% kevlar. Off-white.
Looks resolved. Definitive.



Fourth one.



Fifth one.



Sixth one.



Seventh one.



Eighth one.



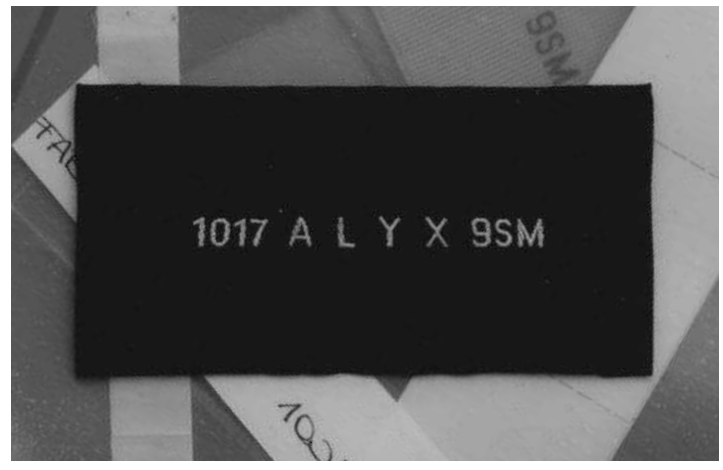
Ninth one.



Tenth one.



Eleventh one.



Twelfth one.



Thirteenth one.



Fourteenth one.



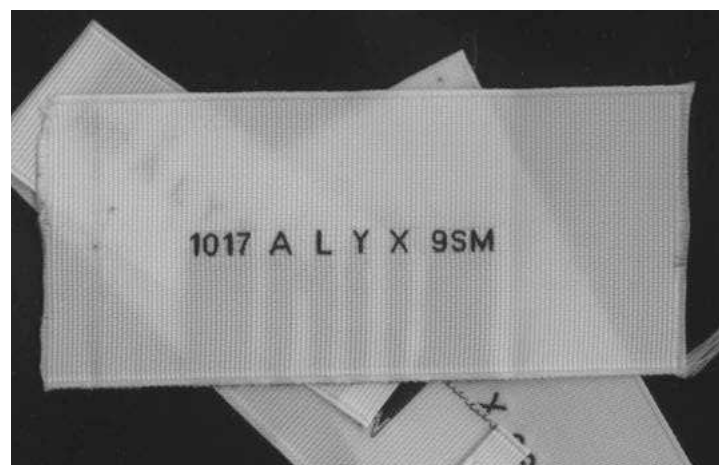
Fifteenth one.



Sixteenth one.



Seventeeth one.



Eighteenth one: black text centred in all capitals. 92% polyamide, 8% kevlar again. Off-white, garment dyed. Looks complete. Completely beyond question.