

EXQUISITE SELF

What does it mean for the Self to be exquisite?

KRISSEY TEEGERSTROM | Artist Statement

EXQUISITE SELF is a continuation in a series of wearable capes made entirely from secondhand materials. A cape surrounds a body, rendering it both obscured and hypervisible. Whether worn or viewed as a standalone art object, each of these capes is meant to envelop the wearer in luminous, reflective, and sumptuous fabrics to impart the feeling of being exquisite.

Definition of *exquisite*:

- marked by flawless craftsmanship or by beautiful, ingenious, delicate, or elaborate execution;
- keenly or delicately sensitive or responsive;
- of special beauty or charm, or rare and appealing excellence, as a face, a flower, coloring, music, or poetry

What would it feel like to wear something that took weeks create? What would it feel like to wear something that is truly one-of-a-kind and cannot be duplicated? What would it feel like to know you could not possibly blend in?

Imagine walking into a room wearing something so unique that no one has ever seen it before. People will look. People will comment, either to you or about you. They will see you and they will react, respond. Who will approach you? What will they say? What doors might open for you? How will you feel with this attention directed your way?

As a child I was conditioned to feel unworthy of care and attention. I grew up in a house marred by addiction and undiagnosed mental illness and suffered neglect and emotional abuse throughout my formative years. How does this affect the Self? I explored this in my 2022 exhibition titled *I Was Already Everything*, where I created one-of-a-kind capes depicting the fragments of my Self that I recovered through trauma therapy.

In my post-traumatic growth, I have begun to build self worth for the first time in my life. The opposite of neglect is to be nurtured and to be seen. For someone who was left alone and ignored as a child, what does it mean to draw attention to oneself?

Nothing, and no one, is disposable. In my practice I use secondhand materials, from the fabrics to my tools including my 1948 Singer Featherweight sewing machine. Discovering secondhand materials is a deliberate process which informs the final designs. This is also a way for me to express my devotion to conserving the environment, a value that is sacred to me.

My inspiration takes me down paths I have not tread before and, heeding its call, I experience healing and growth. These capes have worked on me. They invite me to be seen, and to share what's most precious to me, from the truths that make us to the dreams that keep us going.

The true Self — that precious primordial essence of you that exists before you experience doubts, drama, dreamkillers, hardship, tragedy, abuse or any manner of heavy weather — **is exquisite**. It is sacred. It will always and ever be. Let no one tell you otherwise.