

# CHOSEN FOR REDESIGN DIY

BROKEN LACE - UNPICKING UNEVENLY

**A!**

Aalto University  
School of Arts, Design  
and Architecture

 t-rex





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Photo: Aino Ahola



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Hi!

I am Saimi Parikka, a textile designer graduating from Aalto University. During my studies, I specialised in knitwear. In the summer of 2024, we did a project in collaboration with T-REX and Emmy.fi, where we came up with ideas and made new products out of the unsold clothes from Emmy's second-hand store. In the summer project, I was working specifically with cotton knitwear, unpicking and reworking these. In these tutorials, I'll show you some ideas I've come up with over the summer to revamp old knitwear.

The majority of secondhand clothes that are not sold are in small sizes. When knitwear is modified by unpicking, it widens as the stitches are dropped and at the same time increases in length as the remaining stitches are loosened. This way, a knitwear in size XS can be modified into a knitwear in size M-L. The unpicked surface becomes slightly transparent, lacy and in my opinion interestingly untidy.

These tutorials are particularly suitable for people who are already knitting enthusiasts, as they have a basic understanding of how the stitches and the structure of knitwear work. Unpicking, like knitting, is a repetitive movement that can even feel meditative. The brain likes repetitive and predictable movement, which is a good counterbalance to mental work, screens and hectic everyday life. Unlike in knitting in general, I think the more irregular and sprawling the surface becomes, the better.

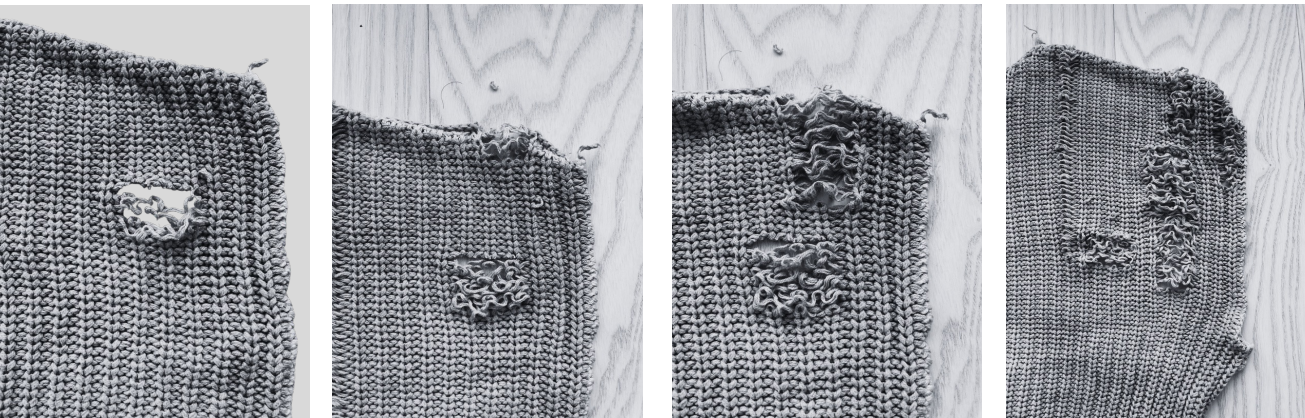
For reworking, it is worth choosing good quality knitwear. For these tutorials I have used 100% cotton knitwear. Smooth-stranded knitwear, such as mercerised cotton or viscose, is easier to unpick than rough, industrially tightly strung cotton knitwear. Thicker yarns are faster to unpick than thinner ones. Fingernails are helpful when unpicking, they can "pluck" the structure open conveniently. When unpicking a garment, you learn to visualise patterns and structures at the same time, when you see what kind of pieces the garment is made of. Unpicking knitwear can feel a little scary - will the whole garment unravel uncontrollably when you cut a hole in it? However, most industrial knitwear is so sturdily made that it does not easily unravel in undesirable spots.

Plenty of great raw materials can be found second-hand. I hope these tutorials will inspire you to save old knitwear and enjoy making things by hand.





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## Broken Lace

### Technique: Unpicking unevenly

In this tutorial, the knitwear surface is unpicked unevenly. The technique is similar to the first method in Love & Destroy, but here the unpicking starts not only at the top but also in the middle of the knit. This makes working a little more challenging, as more stitches to be unpicked are produced when cutting from the centre.

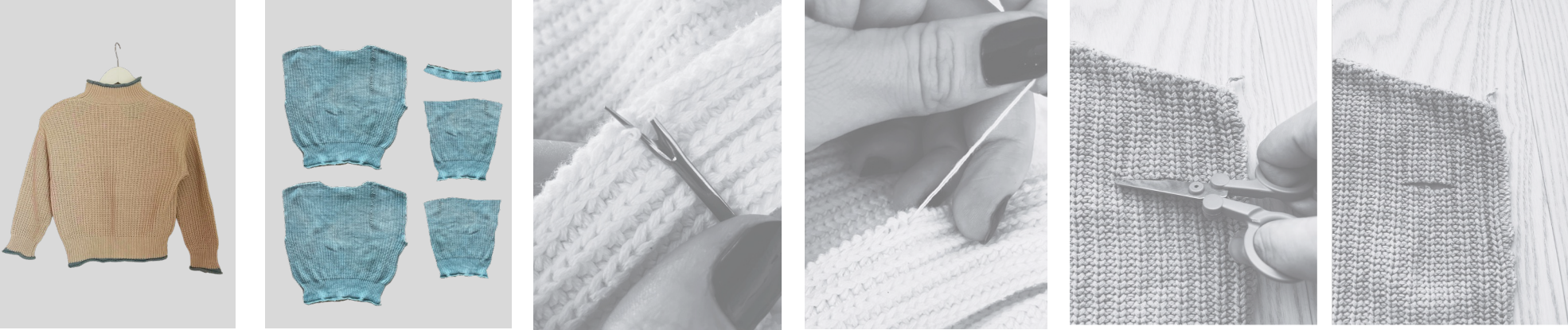
The result is a semi transparent, laddered surface with random holes. The balanced rhythm of the composed holes gives the knit a lively and interesting look. This technique provides the opportunity to create an individual and bold surface, where imperfection is emphasized as part of its charm.

For the tutorial, you need to know

- how to sew straight stitches using a sewing machine and
- know what a stitch is in a knitted garment.

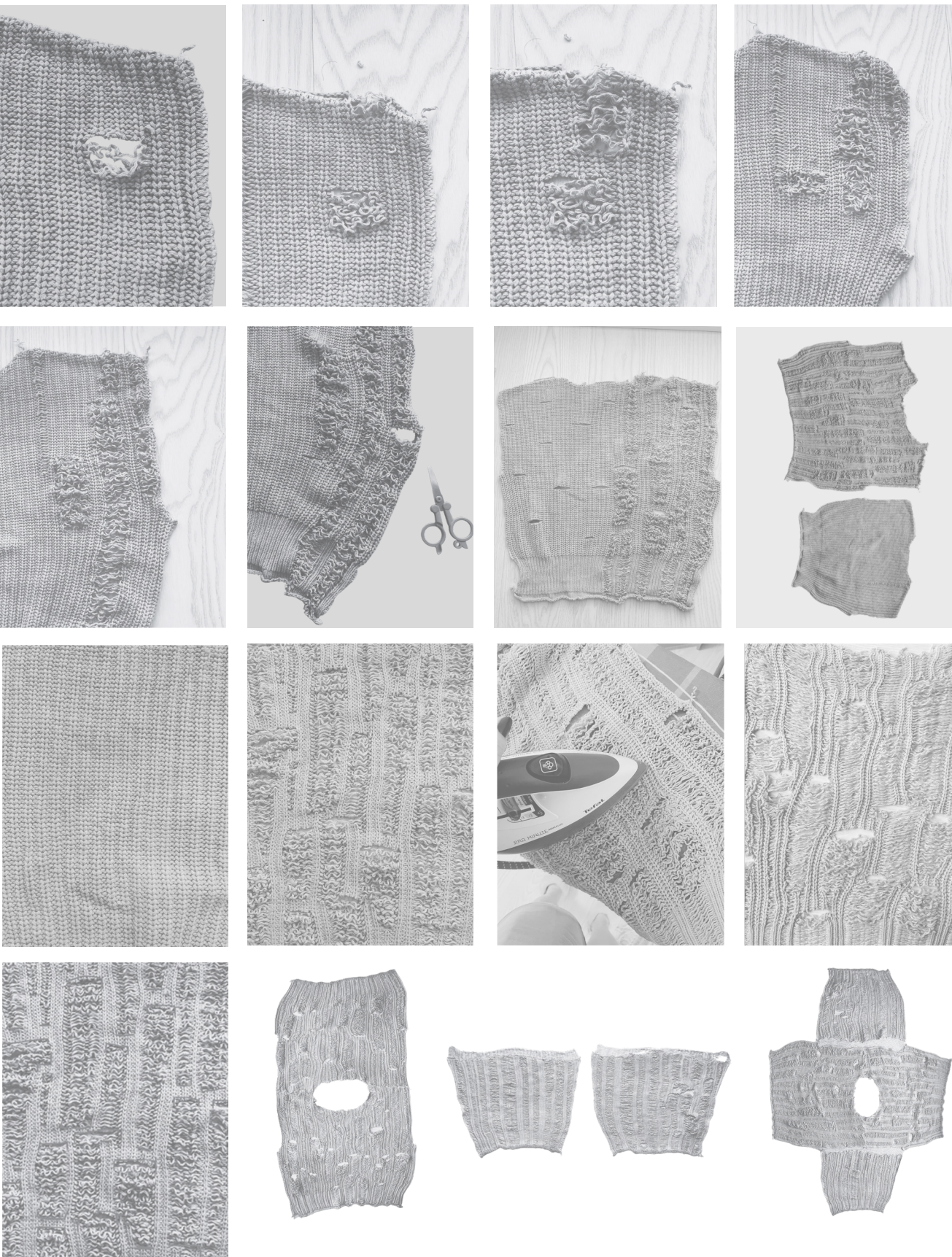
**Supplies:** Knitwear to be worked, seam rippers, sewing thread of the same colour, scissors, sewing machine, iron





## WORK ORDER

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**Starting point:** Children's 100% cotton knitwear. The knit shows that it has been used, but the yarn is clearly of good quality. The yarn is not linty or frayed. In the model I have also dyed the knit to cover stains and faded colour.

#### 1. Dyeing

Tie-dyeing helps cover the stains and revitalise the colour. You can ignore this step if you are satisfied with the knit original color. Even if a knitted garment has some stubborn stains, the unpicking technique breaks up the surface and brings it to life, so the stains may not be as noticeable as on an intact surface.

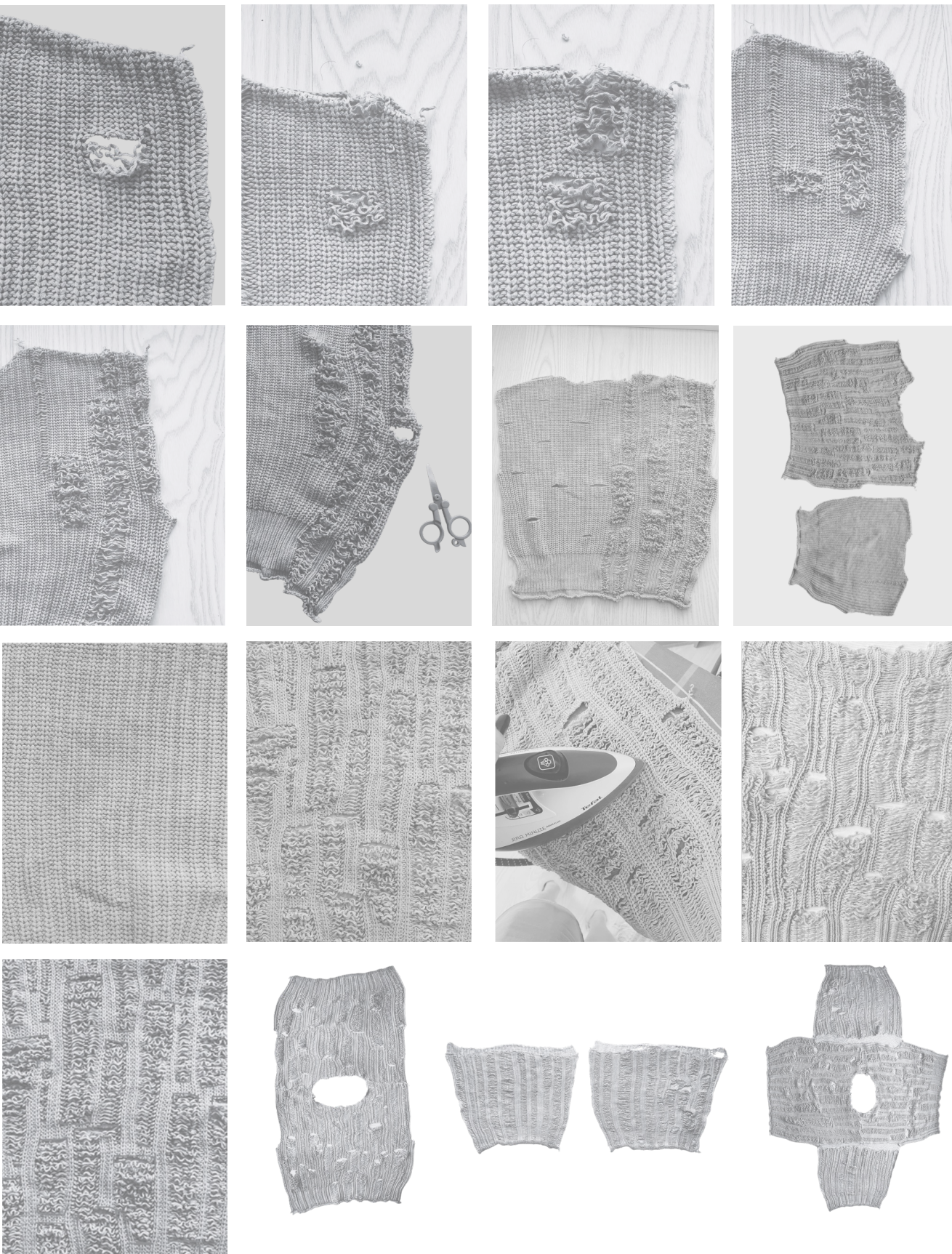
For dyeing, you need a suitable fabric dye, salt, soda and a dyeing pot. Measure the ingredients into the pot according to the instructions on the fabric dye. Knot the garment loosely with thread, but tightly enough so that it doesn't come undone when dyeing. Wet the knit thoroughly before putting it in the dye solution. Preferably soak it in water for a while. Dye according to the instructions. Finally, wash the knit.





## WORK ORDER

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## 2. Unpicking the knitwear from the seams

Separate the knit into pieces from the seams. Often knitwear is sewn together with a chain stitch, which unravels by pulling when you find the right spot. Sometimes knitwear is sewn together with an overlock, so the knit strand breaks at the seams. You can also use knits like this, but you have to cut the seams open with scissors and first off sew over the cut edges twice with a zigzag stitch.

It's not an issue if you accidentally cut the surface of the knit when undoing the seams. This can be finished off by running a zigzag over the cut part. With the unpicking technique, the surface will be uneven anyway, so holes and "blemishes" can be fun details.





## WORK ORDER CHOSEN FOR REDESIGN DIY



### 3. Unpicking the surface of the knitwear

Start by cutting a hole in the knitwear. Cut the hole 2-5 stitches wide.

Start unpicking, being careful not to unpick the stitches laterally. Cut yarn easily unravels laterally and must not be allowed to escape. We want to drop the stitches. The stitches drop downwards. The stitches drop easily when the knitwear is stretched horizontally. You can help the stitches to open by “plucking” using your fingernails.

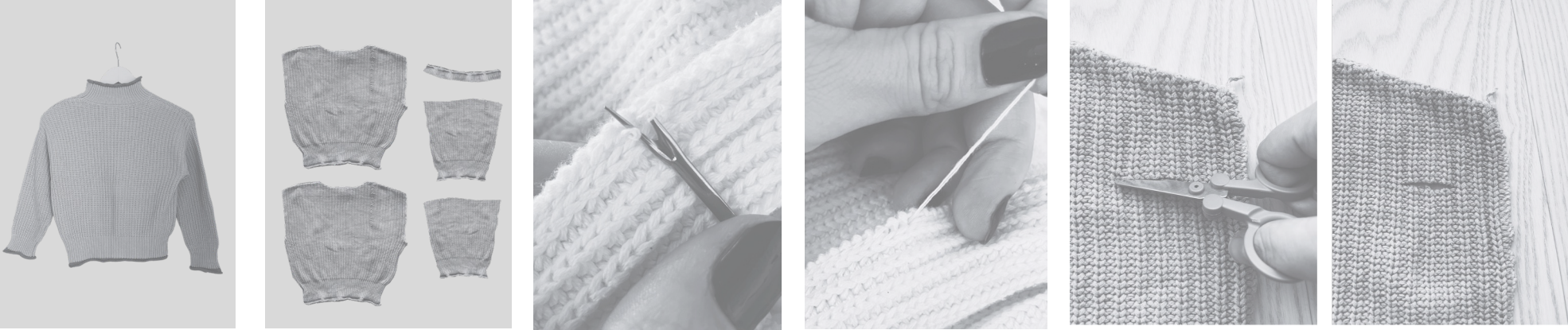
Drop the stitches some distance and cut the next unpicking point.

Continue like this by forming holes all over the knit. If you want the knit to be considerably larger than the original, it is a good idea to have the unpicked sections densely all over the surface. However, it is good to leave 2-5 intact stitches between unpicked spots.

When the technique starts to feel familiar, you can first make the holes in the knit and then continue to unpick.

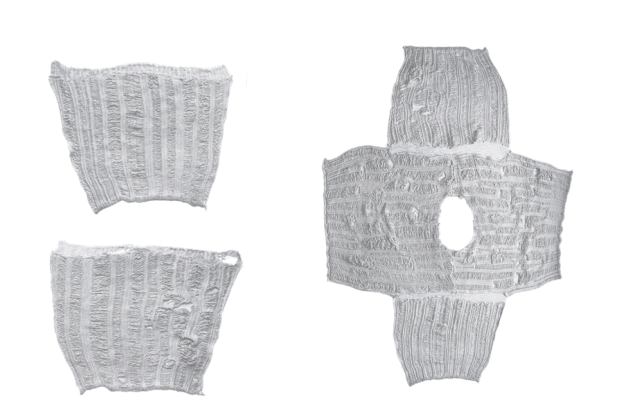
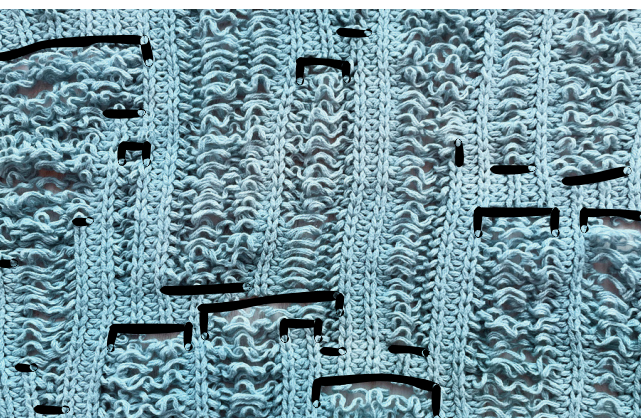
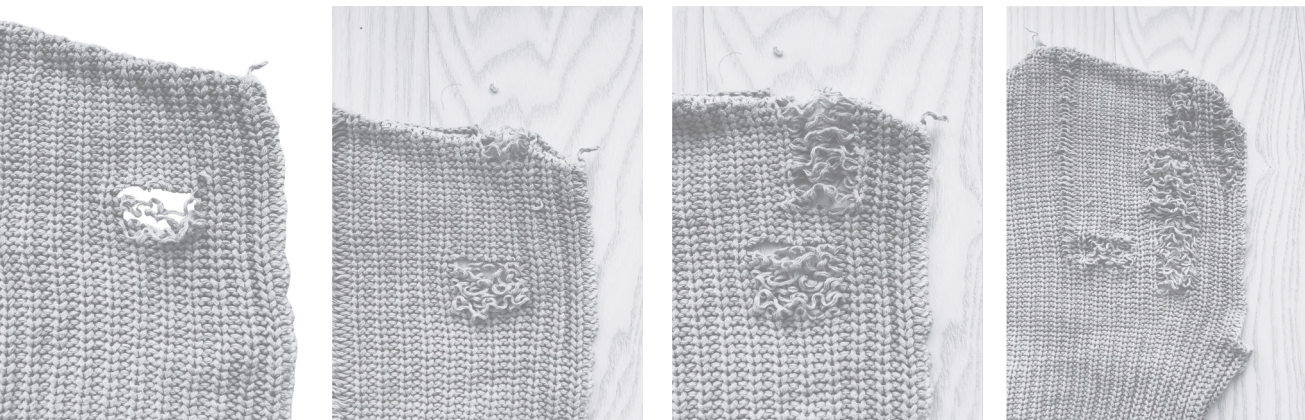
If the material is slippery and the stitches try to escape, it is a good idea to use a sewing machine to finish the broken strands as you unpick them. Otherwise, you can disassemble all the pieces before moving to finishing.





## WORK ORDER

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#### 4. Finishing

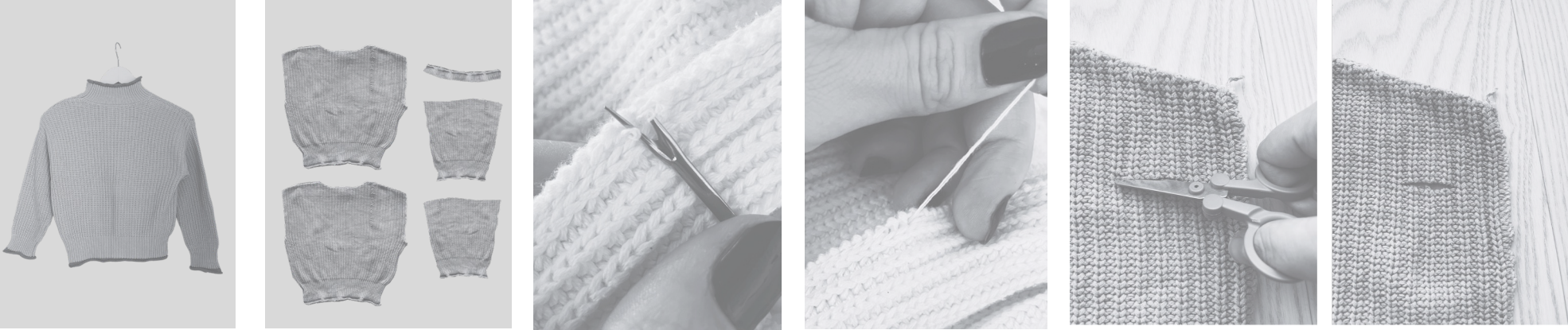
The pictures show the knitwear surface before and after finishing.

Finish the surface with a sewing machine with a straight stitch, following the line marked with black lines. Run a stitch over every cut strand and open stitch. This may require patience, especially in densely unpicked areas, but when a suitable stitch and sewing method is found, work becomes smooth and comfortable. By choosing a stitching thread of as similar a colour as possible, the stitch will blend almost imperceptibly into the knit. Finally, cut off the thread ends neatly.

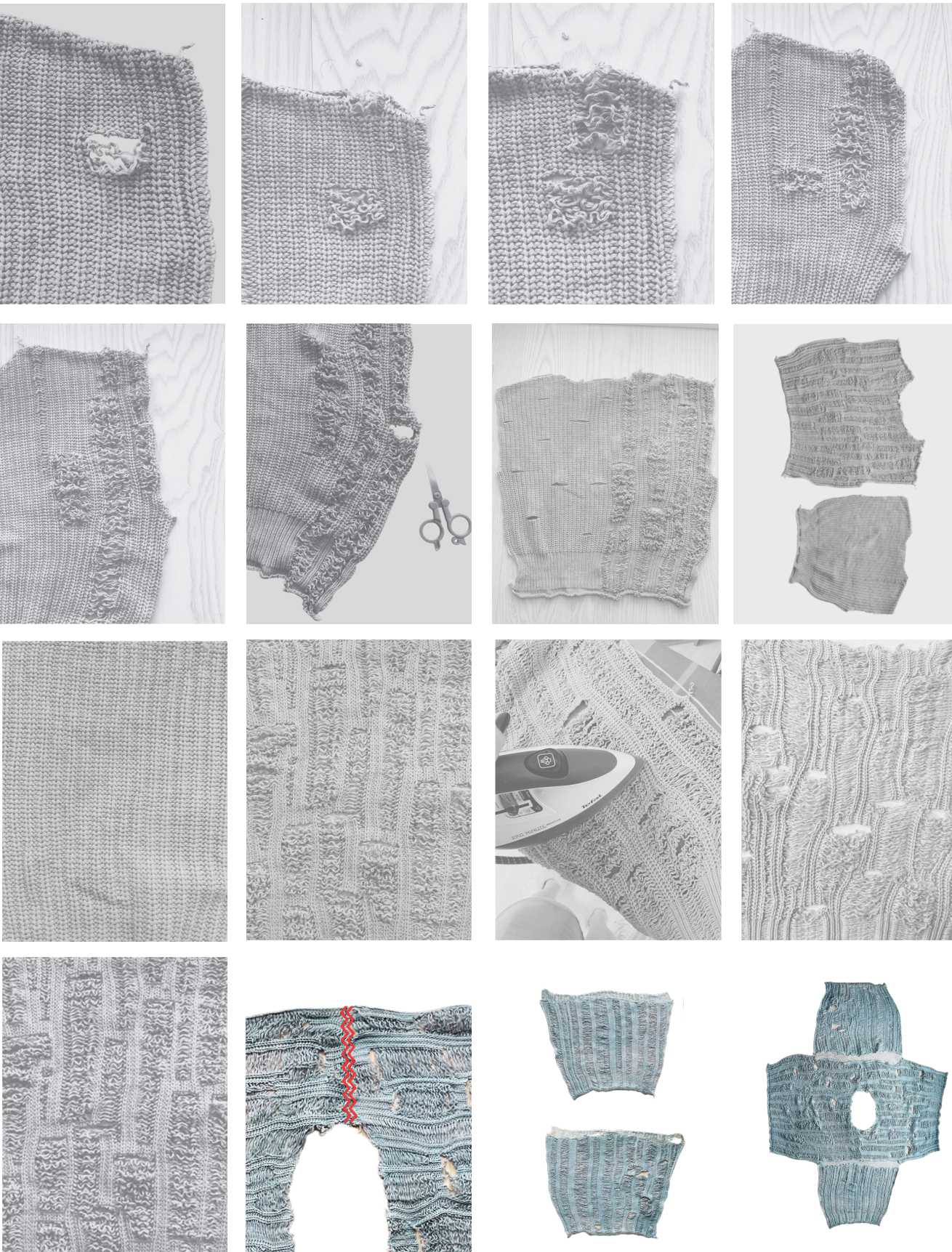
Wet the finished knit, dry it and complete by steaming.

The knit is now ready to be assembled back together.





## WORK ORDER CHOSEN FOR REDESIGN DIY



### 5. Putting the garment together

The next step is to assemble the knitted pieces back into a garment.

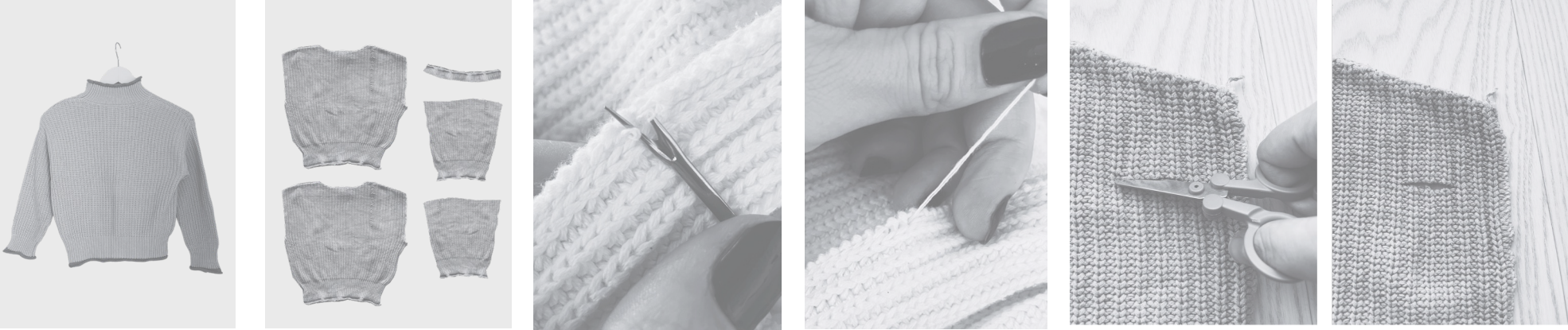
Sew the shoulder seams first. It is better to overlap the pieces and stitch from the top (instead of laying the pieces against each other, as clothes are usually sewn). Place the pieces so that there is an overlap of about 1cm and fasten with pins. Use a narrow zigzag stitch. The red zigzag in the picture shows where to sew. Snip off the thread ends and steam the seam with an iron. Sew both shoulder seams in this way.

As the starting point was children's knitwear, the sleeves remained short despite the unpicking. I crocheted additional pieces using the double crochet for the shoulder seams. I used doubled sewing thread for the crochet to create a mesh-like surface. Thin sewing thread can be challenging to crochet. You can use any thread that you feel is compatible with the unpicked pieces for the crocheted inserts. Attach the sleeve in the same way, overlapping by 1cm with pins and sew. Sew both shoulder seams in this way and steam.

Place the side seams opposite each other with the wrong side facing up. Sew the side seams with straight stitches, leaving a seam allowance of 0.5 cm. Steam the stitched seam.

Now the garment is ready!





## personalisation

### CHOSEN FOR REDESIGN DIY



### How can you vary the appearance of your product?

The starting point of the knit you are working on has a big influence on the end result. You can choose to work with thick- or thin-yarned knitwear. Thin yarn will give a more graceful finish and thick yarn will give a more ragged one. The surface can be unpicked sparsely or densely according to your preference. The more densely you unpick the knitwear, the more it expands. It's fun to destroy and break a clean surface, with love.

### Share the picture on social media!

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