Exploring Creative Silhouettes Through Interdisciplinary Design Processes

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EXPLORING CREATIVE SILHOUETTES
THROUGH INTERDISCIPLINARY DESIGN PROCESSES

By

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A Thesis submitted to the
Department of Art
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with
Honors in the Major

Degree Awarded:
Spring 2015
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Introduction

Design has become an integral part of my daily life. I am attracted to the immediate reward and the total freedom to experiment with the ability to create new layers, instantly change colors or transform shapes and erase mistakes, without the constraints of space and money, that designing on a computer provides. I started out as a digital artist. However, what I was missing in my art was the tangible nature that graphic design alone cannot provide. This realization led me to printmaking. I started out taking Introduction to Printmaking where I learned many of the various print processes such as etching, drypoint, screen print, lithography and monoprinting. Unlike the open-ended design I have experienced as a graphic designer, with printmaking I have to think in layers where each layer is one solid color and is then printed individually to create an additive final print of multiple colors. After creating a design and individual sub-designs, I then have to carefully execute the printmaking process. For instance, if I am screen-printing I will spend a day burning the first image onto a screen, wash out the negative areas, letting the screen dry and then do a test run. I am now able to print the first layer after making sure that everything is aligned properly to ensure that succeeding layers will line up perfectly.

After exploring Printmaking as my studio art focus I began accumulating editions of prints I had done and thought about how I can push my art and process into a third dimension. During my sophomore year as an art student I learned that some courses in the School of Theatre could be taken with instructor permission even if you weren’t a Theatre major. I was eager to explore interdisciplinary art techniques and push my work from this second dimension to a third. With every creative practice there is a process and set of skills to learn. Since fall 2013 I have taken Costuming 1, Advanced Costume Construction, Costume Patterning and Costume
Crafting. Over the past year and a half my skills in sewing, construction and patterning have vastly developed.

During this past summer, I assisted the College of Music’s Opera Department with their summer opera by pulling costumes from the School of Theatre’s costume stock, helping stitch and hem gowns that were newly created. I think one of the most influential things I did this summer wasn’t stitching but pulling garments in the costume stock. Seeing the vast amounts of costumes and garments from decades and centuries ago really inspired me to do something more with my skillset.

Because the Florida State Department of Art stresses an interdisciplinary approach, this method is a way of thinking I constantly use in my artwork. My honors creative project combines all of the skills already learned as well as incorporating my research, designs, patterning, and graphic design and using these skills I created 4 experimental garments that explore manipulation of line and form of the body through the construction of bodice pieces.

**Research**

I found inspiration from past and present designers I have been researching and nothing affected me more than the conceptual designs that these professionals use in their haute couture lines. French for “high sewing,” haute couture often evokes a much more interdisciplinary nature by combining soft sculpture, inventive textiles and original silhouettes. A repeating theme within haute couture is the idea of the silhouette. If you look back at historic garments it is obvious how much we have played with silhouette even in garments such as the bustle and corsets.
Fall semester I spent my time researching period garments. The research I did looking through cabinets full of 17th Century Cavalier costumes and racks of period peasant blouses was critical in finding out exactly what I wanted to create, what textiles I want to use and how abstract I want my designs to be. I looked at many current designers’ lines from now all the way back to the 1990s to get an idea about fashion trends and the evolution of modern clothing. I started sketching initial designs that had no real theme or concept. I was trying to find out what I wanted to create by diving in and trying to fit in the style trends of centuries past into a garment that can be worn today. Those initial sketches were modified, re-sketched or proclaimed ineffective at heavily referencing of past period garments. Once I had decided to incorporate laser cut bodice pieces into my garments a lot of the initial range of sketches became obsolete but, my focus became easier now that I found a theme.

Throughout fall semester, the direction of my creative project grew and changed until I finally decided that I want to produce four garments with a similar concept exploring line, form and silhoutte. The evolution of my creative project was heavily influenced by the Hybrid Print and Costume Patterning classes that I was taking that semester.

In Costume Patterning, I learned how to construct patterns by drafting (male 18th century, jackets and breeches), flat pattern (female 1930’s day dress), draping (female 1920’s gown), sizing patterns and fitting mockups and costumes constructed to fit individual body shapes. In Hybrid Print I learned how to combine different art and printmaking processes to create hybrid art and found that laser cutting was something that I want to further explore after
constructing a grandfather clock with sides etched and cut out by the laser cutter. I saw this is as a way to also incorporate my skill in Adobe Illustrator and digital technology as well.

In the beginning, screen-printing was a process I wanted to incorporate in my designs but I quickly found it problematic. I made two abstract textile designs I could potentially use throughout my designs but both those designs and many of the fabrics I swatched distracted focus from the silhouette I was trying to create. I decided I wanted to keep things simple and cohesive because the construction was what was important.

This spring semester I swatched at JoAnn’s to find a fabric that I could use throughout my pieces. I wanted something modern and unique looking and finally decided to use black industrial pet mesh over black pleather. In Costume Crafting I executed the layering of the two fabrics in the creation of a soft cap project and liked the effect of the modern industrial plastic mesh over the sheen of the pleather. I went back to Joann’s and swatched different black meshes, and shiny black fabric and confirmed my textiles.

As a source for rendering my designs, I used Anne Kiper’s book, Fashion Illustration: Illustration and Technique. Throughout the book I worked alongside comprehensive techniques on how to successfully illustrate figure and fashion. It detailed freehand gesture sketching (quick, loose sketching), 10 head proportions (an elongated version of the realistic 8 head human proportion), balance and movement, perspective and finally fabric rendering techniques. Figure and form are obviously very important in my sketches and while studying through this book I started to develop techniques to convey my designs more clearly and effectively.
Another book that aided me in my process was Pattern Magic, a book about creative pattern making by Tomoko Nakamichi. In this book Nakamichi, a professor at Bunka Fashion College, describes how she attains “pattern magic” by complex sculptural designs. She creates elaborate and geometric off the body volumes and details her research for “turning an image into a silhouette or design detail” (Nakamichi 11). Throughout her book Nakamichi uses mathematics and geometric shapes to create her sculptural designs. Studying her method of moving ideas to well thought out patterns and then to well executed designs was a method I carried over to my creative project. Her textile choices and color palettes were simple and which made the impact of the construction of her silhouettes even stronger.

All of my research process and these new techniques learned in classes became extremely relevant. They also greatly influenced my decisions and the overall direction of the process and creation of my garments.

**Method**

After finalizing sketches I established direction and with that I started to build momentum. It was time to move onto the physical side of my creative process; laser cutting, draping and sewing.

**Bodice Pieces**
The wooden bodice pieces were created by laser cutting Masonite. To get the shape of the form I looked for something that could hold its shape when it was bent. First, I took thin copper wire and bent it over the chest of my half scale form. When I wasn’t able to smoothly bend the copper effectively, I used gear ties but they were not able to bend sharp or firm enough. Finally, I settled on regular paper. Using the slash and spread method I learned in Patternmaking the paper was able to spread across the form. Because the paper was flimsy and had some amount of flex to it, I outlined the paper on sturdy cardboard and cut out that outline to make sure the fit was true to the something without any give. Then I took the paper and outlined the shape on a Wacom Tablet. I added a couple tiny holes throughout the edge of the pieces so I would be able to loop through them and attach them to the fabric.

**Laser Cutting**

Now that I had the outlines of the bodice pieces I focused on actually laser cutting them out using the Department of Art’s Universal Laser System PLS 6.75 Laser Cutter/Engraver. Proper file preparation was important so I followed the instructions provided on the Fine Arts Building’s equipment checkout website.
In Adobe Illustrator, I started a new document and set its dimensions to 32 inches by 18 inches, a little smaller than the bed of the laser cutter, and changed my color mode to RGB. To make sure the laser had a clear and fine line to trace, I set all of the vectored bodice piece outlines to 0.001 inch thick. “This is considered a hairline width and allows the laser to focus its power to the extent that it will pass through acceptable material” ("Universal Laser Systems PLS 6.75 Laser Cutter/Engraver." FSU Art Department Digital Media. <fablab.art.fsu.edu>). The color picker allowed me to change the R to 255, G to 0 and B to 0, in order to change the outlines to true RGB red.

The material used for this specific laser cutter had to be a quarter inch or less. After looking through the list of potential materials I could laser cut (clay, acrylic, mirrored acrylic, leather, wood, matt board, etc.) I decided to look for a material I could paint because at the time I was unsure of my color palettes. I decided on Masonite, a hardboard composite of wood fiber and steam, because it is smooth, came in sheets a quarter and eighth inch thick, is inexpensive, and I have used it for painting many times before. I marked the sheets in 17 inch, a little smaller than the 18 inch bed) intervals and cut them down using the table saw in the Fine Arts Building wood shop.

When I opened up my file on the computer hooked up to the laser cutter, I double checked that all the lines in the file had remained true red and .001 thick. I laid my Masonite sheet on the bed of the laser cutter making sure it was snug in the upper left corner of the bed and used the
materials setup information and adjusted the power of the laser to 100% and speed of the laser pointer to 5%, slow so it would be sure to cut all the way through. In the Universal Laser System printing program I made sure that my design lined up correctly on the board. In the program, I was instructed to click on the most North, East, South and West points of my design. This caused the laser pointer to move to each of these points so I could see if my digital design was extending off the rim of the Masonite board or if it was skewed. I clicked “go” and carefully watched the laser cut into the board, pausing the print whenever flames appeared. When all the bodice pieces were finished I popped them out of the sheet and wiped off burn residue.

After laser cutting the first pieces, I sanded down edges and curves to make the pieces fit accurately. Then I retraced the outline of the shape to create a perfect fit for the half scale form. When converting the half-scale outlines to full-scale, I encountered problems when I scaled the half scale bodice piece up by 200%. It did not fit snugly to the full-scale bodice, nearly but very different in places like the bust than the half-scale had been, and because of this I had to scrap the initial full-scale laser cut piece I made and return to the slash and spread method I used on the half scale to get the paper to fit around the front of the bodice.
Once all the pieces were cut I was able to start draping all of my garments. I wanted bodice pieces to be black so they were cohesive with the black fabric, so I spray painted them and made sure each one fit in the area of the bodice they were created for.

**Draping**

I began by draping a bodice front with a single dart. I marked the grain line about an inch from the edge of the muslin and pinned the line to the centerline of the form making sure to leave the space at the centerline relaxed at the bust point and also making sure not to pin too tightly which would create stress lines. I moved on to the neck line, pinning and cutting to, not through, points so it would lay down on the form. When the side seam was pinned down, there was evident ease around the waist area which was converted into a dart. I marked the center line, armhole, neckline, side seam, waist seam and dart with a marker and removed the muslin from the dress form. To convert this to a pattern, I took out the pins holding the dart in place and I pinned the bodice front onto crafting paper and traced the outline. I used a tracing wheel and tracing paper to mark the dart. I trued-up my lines with a straight edge, marked all the edges with their allotted seam allowance, marked the grain line and labeled the bodice piece, noting the number to cut. Then I followed the instructions below for “Fitting the Bodice”.
“Sew bodice with a long stitch. Press without steam, and place on the form. Analyze the fit, release stitches from the problem area, pin to adjust the muslin, and make corrections to the pattern” (Joseph-Armstrong 40).

After I made corrections to my bodice front I once again trued up the pattern. I continued this process with the bodice back, skirt front and skirt back to create a basic pattern set of slopers to work off of for both my half-scale and full-scale dress form.

Next, I flat-patterned two of the bodices I sketched and discovered, because I was working with laser cut pieces, that it was impossible to fully visualize the interaction of the pieces with the fabric and form without draping rather than using the two dimension flat pattern method. By draping I can pin the pieces directly over the fabric, step back, and analyze and adjust as needed.

Going off of my first sketch I used draping tape to outline the structure, lines and curves of the bodices I was going to create so I could visually see where I needed to drape and adjust curves that looked better on paper but not as nice on the actual three dimensional dress form.

The first two bodices I draped I created muslin mockups for by marking all pinned seams and lines, taking the draped muslin off the form and then converting it into a pattern. I cut out both sides of the bodice and sewed the mockups with a long stitch, adjusted things here and there, corrected my flat pattern once again and began cutting out the real fabric. Because some areas had the double layer of fabric, industrial pet mesh over pleather, it was very important for me to mark the pattern pieces correctly and thoroughly so I wouldn’t forget to cut something or not cut enough of each material.
Once the mockups were made I was ready to move on to cutting out the real fabric. Some of the pieces were flat lined together in order to help secure them especially if I had to sew through four layers or more. Because the industrial pet mesh had many tiny holes in it I set my stitch length very low to make sure it was tightly stitched to the other pieces. When all the pieces were flat lined I finished sewing together the garments and then attached the laser cut pieces by hand stitching through the piece’s tiny holes.

**Conclusion**

In reflection, my creative project was a dive into the unknown when it came to determining the process and getting started. The completion of this creative project has pushed me to invest time into research which has educated me as much as my first hand research. Every step during this process, my original idea changed in some way for the better and that has made me a more adaptable and open artist exploring creative design elements and development.

I would revisit trying to incorporate screen-printing or fully printing the textiles I designed and experimenting with shape through draping. I also would have liked to focus on the lower half of the body in terms of pant and skirt shapes that could expand off bodices I created. In the future, I want to incorporate more of my graphic design skills into fashion sketches, illustrations, line drawings and outlines of my work that can be easily interpreted by the viewer.

Completing this Honors in the Major creative project greatly influenced my future goals. After post-grad life, I will market myself as a versatile designer who can apply multiple skills effectively in the execution of an idea. I will continue to design, drape and sew and use this project as a milestone to capitalize on ideas (shape, silhouette, construction and creative design) that this project has allowed me to investigate.
Bibliography


