

Jan 1st, 12:00 AM

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Zhang, Ling; Holland, Brent; and Sanders, Eulanda, "From Chinese Painting to Wearable Art: The Development of Wearable Art Design Process Model and Evaluation Methods for Wearable Art Designers" (2017). *International Textile and Apparel Association (ITAA) Annual Conference Proceedings*. 18.

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From Chinese Painting to Wearable Art: The Development of Wearable Art Design Process Model and Evaluation Methods for Wearable Art Designers

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Keywords: design process model, documentary methods, evaluation methods, wearable art

Introduction. Wearable art is “art composed of materials structured so they can be worn on the body and that exhibit visually exciting design elements and principles” (Bryant & Hoffman, 1994, p.86). The uniqueness of wearable art is that no two wearable art pieces made by a designer should be alike (Becker, 1978), so it is not reproducible or made through mass-market production (Dale, 1978). Wearable art is a visible symbol that communicates designer’s belief, life style, culture, knowledge, and aesthetic tastes to the world. However, wearable art design is a complex practice (Lawson, 1980). Applying design process model as the framework during the creative process facilitates documenting the process in a method easy to interpret and replicate for other wearable artists or designers. Thus, the purpose of this research were to: (a) fuse the techniques of Chinese painting and art philosophy with contemporary garment silhouettes to create three lines of wearable art that are inspired by the three most prominent motifs found in Dafang Zhang’s (the researcher/designer’s father) *Xie Yi* painting, (b) propose a model outlining a design system for creating wearable art useful to other designers and artists based on documentation of the wearable art design, and (c) examine the methods of evaluating wearable art design regarding the comparison between self-reflection and professional evaluation.

Background. The existing design process models and linear design process frameworks were developed for the production of functional apparel design and ready-to-wear design. However, wearable art designers follow a self-oriented creative process rather than a user-oriented focus (Bryant & Hoffman, 1994). Therefore, theoretically, the focus and the ways the wearable art designers solve design problems may differ from those of the ready-to-wear designers working in industry. Literature on design processes of functional or creative apparel design focuses on the analysis of the logical, theoretical, and rationalized stages of evaluation, while ignoring the critical role of the designer in the design process. In scholarly literature, there is no documentation of a design process model for wearable art designers.

Methods. In order to examine and propose a design process model specifically for wearable art design, the researcher/designer (R/D) created a nine-piece wearable art collection inspired by Chinese paintings that drawn by R/D’s father using a variety of textile surface design techniques. In preparation to undertake this design research, the R/D tested the feasibilities of using Chinese ink as a natural dyestuff and textile painting medium using AATCC standard methods (2008). A new design process model, specific for wearable art design, was proposed based on the design processes of three groups and documentary materials recorded during the design processes by the R/D. A web-based survey was conducted during and after the exhibition in order to obtain the results of quantitative and qualitative data of designer’s self-evaluation and professional evaluation on the performance of the wearable art collection. To give participants a

clear understanding of the wearable art collection, the web-based digital portfolio was completed before sending out the survey.

Results. Total 276 pieces of cotton and silk fabric swatches were used in the submersion dye and silk painting tests. The results indicated that all the fabrics exhibited excellent colorfastness to light, and withstanding repeated hand laundering at a low temperature with 0% and 5% salt concentrations. The nine-piece wearable art collection was created and accomplished using a variety of handcraft techniques. The main themes and sub-themes were distilled from the evaluation data. The themes indicated that the participants understood the expression that the R/D wanted to present through the wearable art collection via the information provided in the digital portfolio.

In order to examine the effectiveness of using the wearable art design process model, the R/D kept track of the relative time spent in each design step developed according to the design process of wearable arts. However, the entire design process for creating the wearable art collection cannot be described as a linear process, as the self-reflection and public evaluation alternated during the design process and impacted the decision making. Therefore, a three-dimensional model (a spherical model) is an appropriate format to demonstrate the concepts of the wearable art design and represent the design process.

The IAPE model (Figure 1) illustrates that the core of the model represents the exhibition which is the goal of creating the wearable art. The outer layer of the ball represents the wearable art designer. Four tubes emerging from the ball represents the thinking and design process. The tubes are three-dimensional and hollow, allowing for design ideas and working steps to travel between the tubes. The core of the four balls represents the four design foundations for the process of wearable art design: (a) inspiration, (b) aesthetics, (c) production, and (d) expression. The outer layer of each ball included the working concepts represents by small balls. The concept balls can move around the foundation core, because the R/A may adjust the working process in accordance with the demands of the specific project. Another two tubes connect the diagonal balls, carrying the activities of the self-reflection and public evaluation. All tubes are connected, allowing the R/D's thoughts, design ideas, knowledge, and evaluation to circulate freely between each ball.



Figure 1. IAPE Model

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