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Naturally Butterlies

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Naturally Butterflies

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Keywords: slow fashion, natural dyeing, butterfly, appliqué

Measurements: Jacket: Bust 35 1/2" Waist 29"; Skirt: Waist 28" Hip 36"

This two piece ensemble implements “slow fashion” through appliqué, hand embroidery, beading, and natural dyeing, targeting the designer market. It expands on my past creative design scholarship in sustainable fashion in which I created multi-function garments using natural dyeing and “design light” concepts (Whang & Haar, 2009; Whang, 2012; Whang, 2015; Whang & Yang, 2016; Whang, 2017). Slow fashion is a sustainable fashion model coined by Kate Fletcher comparing fashion to the slow food movement. Fletcher (2008) explains: “Slow fashion is about designing, producing, consuming and living better” (p. 173). Her approach advocates changing the dynamic among stakeholders—designers, buyers, retailers, and consumers—by increasing their awareness of workers, communities, and ecosystems. Together with an emphasis on high quality workmanship, which slows down the design and production process, slow fashion achieves sustainability by creating fewer but more emotionally durable clothing.

Inspired by the glamorous look of 50s fashion, I decided on a mermaid silhouette. The design process started with sketching my design ideas and then draping the muslin on the dress form while finalizing the skirt design. For the jacket, I used flat patternmaking. The length was made very short, right below the waistline with a snug fit. The raglan sleeve was made with a yoke style line, and a sleeve band was used to secure the gathers around the short sleeve hem right above elbow length. The collarless, V-shape built-up neckline and the puff sleeve are harmonized well with the exaggerated gore silhouette of the skirt’s high low design.

The surface design of this ensemble was inspired by the unique shapes and beautiful colors of butterfly wings. Butterflies symbolize freedom, fun, happiness, and purity (Jaima, 2011), which I strive for in my own life. Their beauty has caught the eyes of many great designers including Giorgio Armani and Alexander McQueen. I chose 100% cotton velveteen for its featherlike softness and gorgeous sheen to create a luxurious look. Lac, a Southeast Asian scale insect, was used for the natural dyestuff, at 15% WOF. Lac usually produces red shades on protein fibers and pink shades on cotton fibers, depending on the use of mordants. The fabric was first cut and mordanted overnight with tannin (8% WOF), aluminum sulfate (15% WOF), and cream of tartar (6%) to help produce the colors. Then, the mordanted fabrics were dyed using physical resist techniques including clamping, folding, pleating and bunching to mimic the unique patterns of butterfly wings. Some of the appliqué fabric pieces were kept in the dye bath for longer time periods to create a variety of different shades.

Appliqué was used to create a more luxurious and interesting dimensional look. I first hand drew the butterfly motifs on card stock paper using various shapes, sizes, and designs inspired by Korean artist Lee Jung-Seob, who is widely loved for his unique blend of traditional Korean art style and early 20th century expressionism (The National Museum of Modern and

Contemporary Art, 2016). The motifs were then cut from self-fabric dyed with lac and arranged on the ensemble to portray the flutter of butterflies, creating the sensation of a floating, wavy flight path. They were attached and decorated by hand embroidery using running, back, chain, French knot, feather, and parallel whip stitches with 100% cotton embroidery floss. To enhance the look, I sewed various colors of glass beads with bugle, chop, and seed shapes inside and outside the appliqués. Then, the hem of the skirt was bias-bound with lightweight cotton dyed in an exhaust dye bath. An invisible zipper was inserted into the skirt. The ensemble was fully lined with 100% cotton for the jacket and 100% rayon for the skirt, which were also dyed in an exhaust bath. Finally, several hooks and eyes were used for the jacket's front closure.

This ensemble contributes to the textile and apparel field by demonstrating slow fashion design concepts and promoting awareness of sustainability. It illustrates how the use of time consuming techniques such as appliqué, hand embroidery and beading can enhance consumers' emotional attachment to their clothing, ultimately leading to both more satisfying fashion and a smaller environmental footprint. The combination of high quality materials and a dynamic, 3D look creates a unique garment that evokes 50s glamour and the colorful beauty of butterflies that is sure to leave a lasting impression.

Date completed: May, 2017

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