

## United in Love

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Given current social upheavals around the world, artists and designers continue to address issues of social inequality and racial discrimination in their work to raise awareness and promote justice and fairness. Now more than ever, the imaginative effort and aesthetic experience of many artists can serve as true agents of change, presenting alternative sustainable models to satisfy both environmental and social needs (Museo Salvatore Ferragamo, 2019). For example, fiber artist Bisa Butler has devoted her quilted portraits to celebrating black life. Through vibrant colors and life scale portraits of African American people, her works express the equal value of all humans (Butler, 2020). A recent fashion exhibition titled *Wearing Justice*, displayed a series of design works by academic researchers and fashion students with perspectives on today's global concerns such as race inequality and gun violence. Garments, textiles, and other exhibits not only cultivate an environment for people to have conversations about these social issues, but also remind us of the power and deep significance carried by what we wear and how we wear it (Kent State Museum, 2020).

The purpose of this design was to explore the potential of modular design for wearable art in order to inspire individuals to work together to achieve peace and unity. In response to social inequality and racial discrimination, this design was inspired by the existence of the United Nations (UN) organization and the aim of its members to foster cooperation and maintain world peace and security. The UN's directive is to act as a united people; to put aside cultural, racial, and linguistic differences in recognition of larger, unifying characteristics for the betterment of the world (United Nations, n.d.). By combining with a modular concept, in which pieces can be formed into various interlocking units/shapes without the need of a sewing machine, it symbolizes the joining of peoples and cultures seamlessly with a unified voice or vision.

As a concept, modular design has been explored by textile and apparel designers. For example, the *Fragment Textiles* designed by Soepboer and Van Balgooi developed two small wool forms, squares and stars, which were assembled to create a textile (Stam & Eggink, 2014). Previous studies from the designer have also explored the use of modules to create wearable pieces (Chen & McMahon, 2018; Chen, 2019). The challenge of this design was to create modules that can not only be combined independently to create garments, but also create modular shapes with unique and meaningful designs. In combination with the multiple-colored skirt, the two-piece ensemble demonstrated a strong and expressive visual and social impact in all views.

The process started by developing the module based on a polygon shape which was used in the designer's previous work. Taking inspiration from the logo of the United Nations organization and an image of people clasping hands, a group of human body-shaped silhouettes was created on the polygon shape in Adobe Illustrator and arranged to form a circle to symbolize the global seen on the UN logo. Functional cutouts were then added on each of the six body outlines to be interlocked. Figure 1 represents the body-shaped module and the module's interlocking method. The body-shaped modules could be interlocked together by hand through the slots to create a textile without the use of a sewing machine

Page 1 of 3

(Figure 1). Paper samples were also made to test out the interlocking system before moving on to the next step.

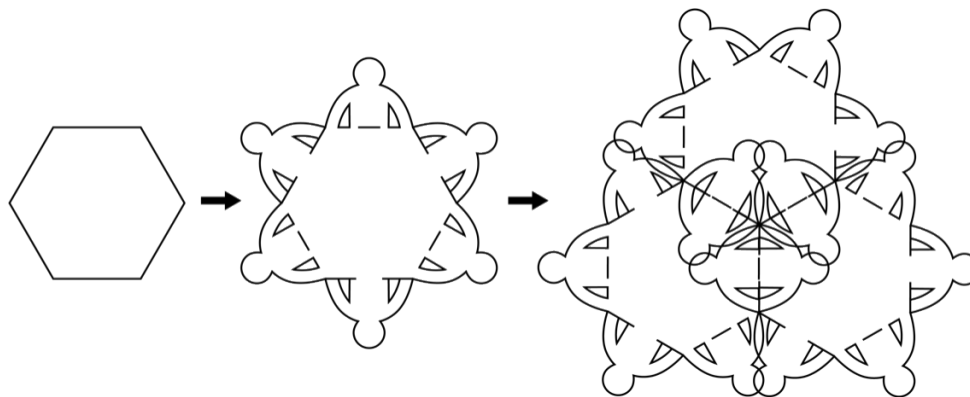


Figure 1: Body-shaped module developed from a polygona and its interlocking method.

Next, to complete the top for this design, a blue suede fabric was chosen due to the appropriate weight of the fabric and the durable nonfraying edges once cut. Additionally, the color blue, found on the UN logo, symbolizes unity and peace. A laser cutter was used to cut out the modules in five different scales, based on a method explored in the designer's previous design research for fitted modular garments (Chen, 2019), which was to gradually increase the scales of the modular shapes to fit the three measurements of a dress-form. Those modular shapes then joined together through the slots on the sides to create the top with the modules from smaller shapes on the neck and waist and gradually bigger shapes on the busts and hem. Even though a sleeveless top was used, the modules could be transformed into a variety of looks, allowing for personalization.

For the skirt, the pattern of a half circle skirt was first drafted on Optitex. The prints were created from Adobe Illustrator and then digitally printed on a cotton twill fabric. For the print design, multiple colors of geometric shapes were overlapped to represent the rainbow of races and cultures around the world. After the fabric was digitally printed and cut out, the skirt was sewn together with lining and an invisible zipper on the side.

Sadhgurua stated, "Fashion is a universal language that has the power and potential to create inclusiveness in human beings around the world (Michaud, A. P. C., 2019)." The module design of individuals holding hands in a circle represents equality among all individuals. By working collectively, we can advocate for a more just future. This design encouraged conversations about social inequality, racial discrimination, conflict resolution, and contributed to the existing body of work regarding modular designs for wearable art. This work reflects the need for wearable art that has power to move people to advocate for social change. This design also aligns with the designer's creative scholarship on fashion modularity. Future studies will continue the exploration of different wearable art designs utilizing module shapes and various materials.

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