



## Falling Upward

Kelly Kay Reynolds, University of Wisconsin-Stout, USA  
Mentor: Jongeun Rhee, University of Wisconsin-Stout, USA

Keywords: Hot air ballooning, experience, design

### Design Statement

#### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the design was to communicate a memory of a moment, a first, a feeling, which I could never experience again. The Falling Upward dress is a design that reflects my perspective of the hot air ballooning flight that I took in the summer of 2019 in Colorado. The challenge of the design was to communicate emotions felt before, during, and after the flight, which I could not even describe verbally. The outfits illustrate my personal emotions of the first-time flight and insight into the physical features of air balloons, such as their overwhelming size.

#### Process, technique, and execution

The design process began with researching the history of hot air balloons and their anatomy. The first hot air balloon to take flight occurred in 1783 and was completely made of paper and silk (Crouch, 2009). Taking inspiration from this part of history, the outfits consist of a lighter weight silk dress as a base, with a sculpture depicting the various elements of a balloon. Hot air balloons float with the wind and are designed to be made as if they are lighter than air. To incorporate the idea of lightness, the base dress under the sculpture is simple and made of white, transparent silk, while the silhouette is loose and without a closure to be lighter in weight. The slip has two slits on each side seam, helping the dress flow. The hem lines are different lengths from the front and the back. The back is longer to accentuate the flow of the material while a wearer is walking, like a balloon floating with the wind.

I closely examined the shapes, colors, and technical mechanism of hot air balloons and had a vision to incorporate their volume and sculptural elements into the outfit. Even after numerous sketches, it was difficult to put my visions to paper. I repeatedly went back to look through my research and inspiration photos that I took during the hot air balloon flight. I decided to utilize the close-up photos of the balloon. Hundreds of photos of the balloon were printed out and cut up into different sections along the panels of balloon, which separated the gores of the balloon into squares. The photo cut-out panels and gores were re-arranged and re-configured. As a result, additional hundreds of design ideations were generated (See Figure 1.). A final structure

of the falling upward dress was chosen to best depict the moment of a breezy flight after a successful launch.

Air balloons are often very colorful and have a checker-like pattern. However, the combinations of white, dark green, navy, and deep purple colors were chosen for the outer layer of the outfit to communicate the calm but slightly fearful moments of the flight. Medium-weight, textured silk fabrics were chosen. To give an even weight to all of the panels, I decided to hand dye off-white and navy shaded fabrics. The combination of reactive and acid dye materials was used to dye the silk fabrics. Until finding the desired dark purple and green shades, mixes of different formulas were explored. After some trial and error, my formula was found. It consisted of what dyes to include and exclude, as well as the washing and drying process of the material.

The most important part of the outfit was how to express the airy, floating, and voluminous nature of a hot air balloon flight. This was achieved by twisting, turning, and manipulating horse-hair braids. A total of four prototypes were made. While creating muslin prototypes, I enjoyed the opportunities to improvise and play with the placement of each gore. Having a fluidity design in mind, in which one part of the body would not look too heavy, the gores were twisted and pinned in place. The braids were sewn down with a zig-zag stitch to maintain the structural integrity. Then, panel pieces of gores were carefully placed.

#### Aesthetic Properties, Visual Impact, Cohesion, and Originality

When creating the panels, their colors, sizes, pattern, and color placements were precisely planned. Different shapes and sizes of panels were implemented to represent the balance of a hot air balloon, while highlighting the flowy and moving nature of flight. This outfit describes my personal experience and emotions during the flight. This is my own, original point of view, but the design was created to share my personal experience with viewers. Viewers can experience what the designer experienced and see what the designer saw, without having to be there.

Figure 1. Collages of Photo Cut-outs



## Reference

Crouch, T. D. (2009). *Lighter Than Air: An Illustrated History of Balloons and Airships*. United States: Johns Hopkins University Press.