



## Gratitude

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### Contextual Review

In Kansas, where farmland meets the tallgrass, *Plain People* is a term used to describe a particular clothing choice and not a geography. My parents were once a part of this insulated religious group wearing plain clothes, known as the Holdeman Mennonites. Mennonites are known as “plain people” due to the clothing they wear: women in shirtwaist dresses and men in button-up shirts and jeans (Arthur, 1998; Kauffman, 1991). Scholars such as Linda Arthur (1998) have described the use of the shirtwaist dress as a patriarchal source of control over the female body. Adult baptized women also wear a head covering at all times during the day and are prohibited from wearing jewelry, cosmetics, and from cutting their hair (Arthur, 1998; Kauffman, 1991). My parents were shunned from this group as young adults but continued to live near the community. As a child I grew up with my grandparent, aunts, uncles, and cousins who were still practicing members of the Holdeman Mennonite church. Alongside my grandmothers I learned to make, mend, and repurpose what would have otherwise been discarded.

### Concept

Currently, as a designer and researcher I have been exploring my ambiguous feelings about religious dress and the use of discarded materials for textile design. *Gratitude* is part of a larger collection that explored my personal history and temporary existence; reflected in garments that are similarly ephemeral and personal. This collection is comprised of fully biodegradable garments, using only natural textiles, thread, and findings. Each piece is displayed on a dress form created from a 3D body scan of myself and made from a biodegradable wood composite. The purpose of *Gratitude* was to (1) explore the themes of agency and structure through silhouette and (2) repurpose discarded food waste as a natural textile dye.

### Process

College campus food service units were contacted via email and given a list of 12 food waste items that could possibly be used as a natural dye (see Table 1). Two chefs from student housing responded to my request and had black bean soaking water and yellow onion offcuts for me to pick up on a weekly basis. For this garment, 50% cotton and 50% silk plain weave was mordanted with 5% aluminum acetate to weight of fiber (WOF) and dyed with approx. 100% yellow onion offcuts to WOF in a hot water bath. The resulting color was a bright yellow which was altered to a warm green using 2% iron to WOF. A mottled tone on tone look was created on part of the dyed textiles by airbrushing the iron solution onto the fabric, twisting and rearranging the textile several times. Flat patterning, draping, hand sewing, and machine sewing techniques were used to produce the design. Cotton thread, pearl buttons, and the silk/cotton textile were selected to create a fully biodegradable garment. The finished dress is an asymmetrical design, carefully draped and structured to represent the inspiration.

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1. Green vegetable or herb offcuts	2. Avocado pits and skins	3. Pomegranate rinds	4. Onion skins or offcuts	5. Beet offcuts	6. Carrot offcuts
7. Soaking water from Black Beans	8. Citrus offcuts or rinds	9. Purple Cabbage offcuts	10. Apple peels	11. Fennel tops	12. Rhubarb leaves

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Table 1. List of requested natural dyestuff from dining facilities

#### Contribution

This project contributes to research surrounding the use of food waste as a natural dye by exploring what was available from local dining halls. By connecting dyers to chefs, it is possible to find natural dyes from biomaterial that would otherwise be discarded.

#### References

- Arthur, L. B. (1998). Deviance, agency, and the social control of women's bodies in a Mennonite community. *NWSA Journal*, 75-99.
- Kauffman, J. H. (1991). *The Mennonite mosaic: Identity and modernization*. Herald Press (VA).

