

## *Entrapment*

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Keywords: Woman's body, symbol of control and desire, feminine sexuality, ambivalent aesthetics

### **Design Statement**

*Entrapment* is one of the creative outcomes of a research project that aims to explore the multitude of concepts "woman" embodies and metaphors she symbolizes in western and eastern civilizations throughout history and to visually represent these concepts, some ambivalent (e.g., life/birth vs. death, salvation vs. damnation, desire vs. control) and some paradoxical (i.e., a woman is a regenerator but not a creator). *Entrapment* will be part of a solo exhibition of the designer's creative works resulting from this research.

At the inception of this creative research project, the designer chose *The Second Sex*, written by Simone de Beauvoir, as a theoretical and philosophical inspiration source. Based upon her extensive research and her own experience as a female in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Beauvoir tried to describe the fact of being a woman in the history of humanity from the female point of view and argued that the entire history of women was written by men who defined themselves as One while setting up women as the Other in opposition to themselves. Women are not only objectified but also excluded as the Other (Beauvoir 2011). Women have been forced into the "systems of oppositions; duality, alternation, opposition and symmetry" (Levi-Strauss 1969 as cited in Beauvoir 2011, p. 7). A hierarchy of the sexes established by men destined women to be subordinated to men, possessed, and exploited by men. In almost every religious and patriarchal context, women and their bodies were described as innately weak, passive, inferior, incompetent, or absent (Rodriguez 2016; Ha 2018) because women had never been portrayed with authority and autonomy.

If, according to Beauvoir, "the woman's body is one of the essential elements of the situation she occupies in this world" (p. 48), the designer believes that the situations women had to endure (e.g., discrimination, suppression, exclusion, etc.) are realized through women's bodies and clothing. Ioan P. Culianu (1995) also asserted that women's bodies are "the most spoken of because they have the most to tell" (p. 1). The human body is not simply a physical entity independent of social and cultural forces. Therefore, it is not surprising that the woman's body has been likened to a wide range of symbols and descriptors: the sea, the moon and the tide; a birth/life force; Mother Earth or Nature; a fountain of life; a symbol of fertility, reproduction and death; a conduit or vessel; a source of evil, ignorance, and

darkness; an object of erotic lust; a means of physical entrapment and confinement; or the guise of sinner, adulteress, and the immaculate, etc. (Beauvoir 2011; Clark 1971; Cuianu 1995; Rodriguez 2016).

When it comes to feminine sexuality and the body, historically, women endured various forms of social control over and negative perceptions of their bodies, in both Western and Eastern cultures, particularly after Christianity became a dominant ideology in Western civilization and Confucianism in the East, more specifically in Korea. They were trapped by their physical conditions, perceived as intrinsically inferior by patriarchal society. The woman's body is sexually provocative; therefore, women become a "potential danger" to men (Rodriguez 2016, p. 64). A woman's sexual desire must be suppressed because an excessive display was perceived as a dishonor to herself and her family under the strict Confucian values that emphasized the distinction between men and women (Hong 2006). Confucian ideology did not recognize women's autonomy and so aggravated systemic discrimination against women (Ha 2018). Chastity was one of basic virtues women must cultivate, while also fulfilling their most crucial duty in the Joseon Dynasty (1392—1897 CE): producing a male heir. Reflecting the desire to be a good wife and wise mother, women wore dresses decorated with various motifs symbolizing chastity and fertility (Hong 2006). Ironically, while feminine sexuality was degraded and feared by men, it was sought explicitly or implicitly. For example, a woman's dress made the body immobile, powerless and hidden (e.g., corset, panier, crinoline, voluminous skirts, and layers of undergarments). Simultaneously, however, it increased a women's sexuality by eroticizing her body. The dressed women's body has displayed the ambivalent and paradoxical aesthetics of feminine sexuality for women throughout history in both cultures.

*The design of Entrapment* aims to represent the woman's body and feminine sexuality as a symbol of control and desire by exploring the devices developed to represent such ambivalent aesthetics in the Western and Korean dresses and by manipulating their shapes and silhouettes. First, **the designer references** the 19<sup>th</sup>-century off-the-shoulder style that **embodied** sensuality and physical entrapment. The woman's movement is confined between her body and the dress by a red metallic silk brocade pleated band and a black ramie band sewn to the princess lines of the bodice (Figure 1). The top edges of the bands are wired for maintaining and manipulating the shape.

Another reference for this design is the traditional Korean women's underpants that symbolize both chastity and sensuality. Women wore layers of underpants as protection from cold weather, to conceal their skin, and to create a voluminous skirt that symbolized feminine sensuality and fertility (Hong 2006). One of the unique features of the traditional



Figure 1. The front of the off-the-shoulder bodice. After eliminating the side seams, an invisible zipper was attached to the left princess line on the back bodice. Photo by the designer.

underpants is the wide or open crotch that allows women to relieve themselves without taking the garment off. The open-crotch pants have a narrow band attached to each leg at the center from the waist to the knee, and these bands overlap when worn. By converting underwear to outerwear, the device designed for convenience is transformed into a means to highlight feminine sexuality. The designer achieved a full and voluminous silhouette using two traditional Korean quilted silk panels. A long rectangle is cut and folded in half horizontally. The folded edge becomes the closed hem of each pant leg, and the other end is gathered to fit the bodice. The panels of the open crotch are made of Korean traditional ramie and are overlapped and kept closed by the weight of the quilted pant legs. With the wearer's movement, the legs are partially exposed and then hidden again. This specific design suggests the inseparability between concealment and exposure within women's dress in various forms throughout history.

The shiny metallic surfaces of the crinkled silk brocade and faux knit chainmail create a feeling of lust and seduction. Layering these textiles is intended to symbolize that women's vanity and desire have never been veiled or inhibited. Red and black were chosen as the primary colors for this project to represent the various symbolic meanings that these two colors are commonly known to connote: red symbolizes lust, love, and sexual desire; black, a feeling of entrapment and suppressed desire for women.

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