



The Memorial for Beauty Jacket

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Design Mentor Statement: This work was completed by the student as part of undergraduate research project sponsored by our college. Only selected students complete this program each year. The project was planned and executed independently by the student under my guidance. The work was based on the student's research interests that are deeply rooted in her desire for change in the apparel industry in terms of environmental and social sustainability. In fact, focusing on this, the student returned to school to complete her bachelor's degree after working in the industry for several years and will be continuing her outstanding work as a graduate student next year. Throughout her studies, the student has produced high-quality works in terms of both conceptual soundness and physical qualities, and this design is no different. With this design, the student uses a garment as a medium to raise awareness of the ethical issues in apparel manufacturing as well as to connect the consumer to the people and processes involved in the making of clothing, guided by emotionally durable design concepts. The student has read literature on sustainability issues in the industry and various approaches for sustainable apparel design and production prior to completing her design. Laser cutting technology was effectively used by the student to create portrait pieces of a women's face, QR code etched on leather, and flowers, all arranged as a memorial on the back of the garment.

Design concept and purpose: This design serves as a wearable memorial to a woman that lost her life in the Rana Plaza Factory Collapse in 2013. The face of this woman, who was aptly named Beauty, is featured floating on the back of the jacket amongst the national flower of her home country Bangladesh, which is the water lily. The collapse of this factory claimed the lives of 1,132 and wounded 2,500 others (Saaritsa et. al, 2018), in the aftermath, highlighting the deeply unethical labor practices and dangerous working conditions within the apparel manufacturing industry. These workers are left with little recourse but to participate in a system that is inherently exploitative (Ross, 2004).

The overall purpose of the design is to shed light on these issues, especially the invisibility of garment workers and neglect they endure making our clothing, guided by the concepts of emotionally durable design, which is simply design with the intention of capturing the heart of the consumer (Chapman, 2005). In prioritizing connection, a bridge is created between consumers and the makers of the clothing, in addition to highlighting the issues. The garment features a QR code that, when scanned, takes the user to a website that allows them to view information on the makers, materials, and the processes utilized in its creation. This garment is a piece among many created with the aim of starting a conversation around the humans that are

impacted by our clothing choices both domestically and abroad. The hope here is that the conversations spread awareness and add a layer of accountability to consumer decisions.

Design, process, and techniques: This garment is a collarless asymmetric jacket featuring a button closure at the waistband and a contrasting lining. The back of the jacket frames a laser-cut portrait of a woman, Beauty, handstitched to a tulle background, that floats among water lilies, also laser-cut and handsewn to the jacket. The lining and flowers are intentionally made with bright vivid colors, paying homage to the many colorful festivals such as Durga Puja celebrated by the Bengali people (Guha-Thakurta, 2015). Sewn above the portrait, integrated into the overall visual design concept, is a QR code etched on a 1” x 1” leather piece. The code can be easily scanned by a mobile device offering consumers direct and instant access to information about the garment maker and making processes. The design uses repurposed and undyed fabrics to reduce waste and pollution.

The pattern for the jacket was created using traditional draping and flat patterning techniques. The garment was assembled using overlock, lockstitch, and hand sewing methods. Each component of the garment was edge-finished using an overlock stitch and sewn together using a ½” seam allowance, allowing for the ease of repair and alteration in the future. The body of the garment is made from undyed cotton twill.

The initial image of the woman’s face on the back of the garment was created using Procreate and Photoshop (Figure 1a). Laser cutting was used to cut the image pieces out of repurposed velvet fabric (Figure 1b). As described above, the pieces were handstitched to a tulle fabric, also repurposed, which was applied to the garment back as a main visual focal point. Flowers were sketched in Illustrator in preparation for laser cutting. A variety of repurposed synthetic fabrics was used for flowers, which were handsewn to the garment in specific arrangement to frame Beauty’s face.



Figure 1: (a) Digital image and (b) finished laser-cut design of the woman's face on the jacket.

Innovation and significance: The intention of this design was to use a piece of clothing to tell the story of a woman who lost her life due to the greed and neglect of her employers within the clothing industry. The Rana Plaza factory collapse that claimed her life occurred in 2013, and although things have begun to shift, there are still reports of widespread devaluation of garment workers to this day (Brownlee, 2021). This piece is at once a memorial of that which has already transpired and a hope for the future. If we as consumers are connected to the origins of our clothes, perhaps we will value them and those who make them more, leading to more sustainable consumption practices. The body of this piece is made from an undyed cotton, making it easily

recycled once it has reached the end of its usefulness. The memorial back piece is made from repurposed tulle and is easily removed to be used in another iteration beyond this garment.

The innovation of this design lies in its communication to the consumer. Not only does the garment share the story of one garment worker, but it also helps to connect the consumer to the garment maker and making processes, creating a more enduring connection between consumer and clothing. In addition, it provides information to facilitate further discussion of this important matter. The use of a QR code as a bridge from creator to consumer serves to share the process and importance of understanding where our clothes come from and the importance of caring for the humans behind our clothing.

References

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