

The Denim Kintsugi Project

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Design Mentor Statement.

This work was completed as a design student's independent project to conceptualize the design process from a non-apparel/textile inspiration source for creating a garment through sustainable practice. The mentorship process began with introducing design development strategies and guiding the student through the design process for the creative scholarship incorporating sustainability. For this upcycling denim design, the student had to develop the concept by researching her chosen inspiration source, obtaining the recycled materials, pattern development including fitting and alterations, and executing the garment construction. For the construction stage, the student had to experiment with multiple samples to portray the strong visual impact of the uneven look of the gold seals found in her inspiration. This project was selected for submission because the student demonstrated a strong understanding of the conceptual design process and executed the construction with multilayered problem-solving skills. The outcome was a cohesive and visually stimulating design created through a rigorous construction process.

Statement of Purpose.

This project is an exploration of how the upcycling process can be elevated through advanced construction and fabric-piecing techniques. Sustainability remains crucial in garment design and construction as a part of the greater push for solutions to waste and pollution issues. The growing popularity of DIY and upcycling projects is concurrent with the development of sustainability practices. DIY itself is nothing new, but its widespread growth on the cultural scene came with the advent of YouTube and digital media (HISD, 2021). With upcycling particularly, items perceived as lesser value or even trash are re-evaluated to introduce new value and meaning, thus achieving an interesting cross-section of waste minimization and novel interaction. Therefore, upcycling processes could counteract today's world of overconsumption.

Aesthetic Properties & Visual Impact.

The inspiring principle behind this design was Japanese Kintsugi, an art form centered around conspicuous repair and acceptance of the history that makes one stronger. In this artform, which began in the late 15th century with the 8th Ashikaga Shogun, Ashikaga Yoshimasa (Manzella, 2014), broken pottery pieces are reassembled, and the "seaming" of the cracks is covered with precious metal powder/leaf such as gold, silver or platinum. The piece is then reintroduced to its owner as a beautifully mended, restored piece with a potentially greater value from the precious metals used in the repair. Another key element in this design was the fabrication of denim. Denim is proving to be a controversial textile on the sustainability scene, especially in the realm of fast fashion. From the water pollution to which its production is often tied, at both the agricultural and manufacturing stages (Lindwell, 2019), denim is increasingly being called into question in the environmental responsibility discussion.



Denim also has a long history as a durable, lasting fabric, which fits perfectly with traditional Japanese values of preserving and passing on a legacy to future generations (Hoshino, 2013). Therefore, focusing on the upcycling project on such a textile made sense.

The Process, Technique, and Execution.

The steps to execute this design project included inspiration research, design communication, material collection, pattern development, design testing, material preparation, and final assembly. Inspiration was taken directly from a photo of a Kintsugi repaired bowl and sketched into a dress design capturing key elements of the bowl, such as intersecting lines, an emphasis on contrasting materials, and a straighter silhouette. Materials were sourced from two different avenues, one a typical fabric retailer and the other including second-hand or deadstock venues. Fabric sourcing for gold material representing the gold-covered lacquer necessitated finding virgin lamé fabric from a retail setting. The denim materials, however, came from individual and local business donations. Pattern development took shape through draping methods, which were then tested and adjusted in the paper drafts. Two sets of pattern testing and muslin fitting were used to establish the design effectively. For material preparation, the donated denim garments had to be cut up to best facilitate re-fabrication, with seams, hems, and other unusable parts removed from the garment body. Pattern pieces were then laid on the denim sections with optimal fit and coordination in mind. The next step was figuring out how to get the gold lamé fabric conjoined with the denim in the most visually effective way. A sample was made with several sections to explore construction ideas (see figure at right). Next, bias strips were cut, folded, and then sewn into designated seams throughout the design, with special attention to construction order because of the intersecting seams. The folded edge of the strips faced out of the seams and were next topstitched down to unify the denim and lamé fabrics.



Cohesion.

The Kintsugi aesthetic is directly translated into this design by using fabric piecing and introducing another fabric to represent gold as an elevating element. Kintsugi principles of repair and revaluation are also supported by the connection of denim with the upcycling process. Moreover, construction steps such as adding linings and a hand-stitched hem support superior apparel development.

Originality and Innovation.

The goal of this project was to explore and demonstrate processes and a framework that could further sustainability solutions through changing perspectives on DIY and waste minimization. An element of this demonstration was showcasing how a beautiful, well-made garment could be achieved with an upcycling approach, creating something fresh and unique with older, possibly devalued materials. A secondary but integral goal was demonstrating how denim could be reinstated as a durable textile in the minds of consumers.

References

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