



Garden Series. Burial Pantsuit Half-Scale Prototype

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Green burial, halfscale, natural dye

Context, Purpose and Background. My scholarship with natural dyes is merging with textile and apparel design for green burials. I was introduced to green burial garments while participating in the Halfscale Forum for Creative Patternmaking initiated through Cornell University. Thus, this design addressed the Halfscale Forum parameters while exploring garment and textile design for green burial. The Halfscale Forum theme, Inversion, called for viewing the body and patternmaking from atypical points of departure, seams and style lines. I elected to design from the back, supine position wrapping the fabric around the body and limbs with curved seams, shirring, and lacing securing the shape.

'Green, or natural burial is a way of caring for the dead with minimal environmental impact that aids in the conservation of natural resources, reduction of carbon emissions, protection of worker health, and the restoration and/or preservation of habitat' (*Green Burial Council*). Textiles commercially available for green burials include shrouds and wrappings of natural fibers (Michel & Lee, 2017). Michel and Lee (2017) identified three designers of natural burial garments. Pia Interlandi's, *Garments for the Grave*, are pieces designed for ease of wrapping and encasing body parts. Jae Rhim Lee developed a body suit inserted with fungal culture to assist with the removal of bodily toxins through decomposition. Mark Mitchell created elaborate burial costumes using by-hand techniques on naturally fibered fabrics and yarns. My overarching aims are to explore functional apparel design for burial, biodegradability of fiber and natural dye, and textile design related to regional biodiversity. This design, explored patternmaking from the supine position and textile design using local flora.

Process. Starting the design from the back in a supine position, fabric was wrapped around the body using gathers on slits and shirring to maintain a forward motion. The resulting shrug is a one-piece pattern with the sleeves incorporated into the bodice. The pantsuit only has a center back and partial crotch seam. This allows a body to be laid on the fabric and the fabric to wrap from back to front. Ties, interlacings, and casings are used to secure the garment after wrappings are in place. A hood was attached using a facing. A pocket for mementos was placed at the heart.

The shrug fabric was colored from regional garden plants, roses, hollyhock, and beard tongue in pre-mordanted silk organza. The bundle was wetted-out and placed in a dark plastic bag and left outdoors for three days to extract the plant color to the fiber. The pantsuit textile design was created by first bundling purple basil in silk dupioni to create a subtle background. The defined plant imagery is from pounding or hammering Plains coreopsis and sweet potato leaf onto the fabric.

Findings. Designing from the back in supine position was an appropriate starting point for green burial garments as it allowed the body to be placed on the textile and the textile to wrap around the body. The shrug design utilized fabric efficiency with its one-piece design and the casing allowed the garment to be flat for dressing and shirred for fit. A recommended change is a wider opening at the armhole for increased ease of dressing. The general principle of the wrapped pantsuit has merit; however, the tyeing, interlacing and gathering steps are not intuitive to dressing. The functional aspects of burial garments will be explored in greater depth in future designs when time constraints of a design forum are not in place. Designing in halfscale was efficient as iterations were quick to execute and adjust while reducing muslin amounts. The use of local plants to color the naturally fibered textiles supports the aim of natural burials to have minimal impact on the environment.

References

Green Burial Council. (2017, April). <https://greenburialcouncil.org/home/what-is-green-burial/>

Michel, G. M., & Lee, Young-A (2017). Cloth(ing) for the dead: Case study of three designers' green burial practices. *Fashion and Textiles*, 4(4). DOI 10.1186/s40691-017-0088-y

