



Protection for the Elements

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Keywords: sustainability, couture techniques, conceptual/experimental

Mentor Statement: *Protection for the Elements* was created in response to a project prompt I gave in a third-year studio course. Students were asked to design and construct a garment that challenged their abilities and incorporated the skills they had learned to date. The garments were required to be design and constructed at an elevated level appropriate for competition entry. This student chose to challenge herself by incorporating sustainable practices into her garment design and concept. She repurposed tent material as the main textiles for her garment as a way to comment on the effects the fashion and textile industries have on nature and utilize the outdoors as a source of inspiration. This garment was chosen for entry due to its superior construction and strong concept. The students successfully designed and constructed a garment incorporating sustainable practices and produced minimal waste in the process.

Statement of Purpose: Most seek freedom in a winding forest trail, answers lying underneath the stars, or adrenaline on the treachery of a mountain top. No matter the satisfaction we chase, the outdoors serves as a haven for our physical and mental wellbeing. Mother nature has always taken care of us, but can we say we've done the same for her? Somewhere in our bid to become one with the earth, we have managed to single-handedly destroy the forests, rivers, and oceans that serve as our last remaining places of retreat. Overall, 75% of the world's land surface has been significantly altered by human actions, including 85% of wetland areas (Benaboki, 2023).

Ironically enough, the materials that make up our tents, sleeping bags, and outdoor wear are one of the leading contributors to nature's demise. Manmade fibers like nylon and polyester, which make up the majority of camping gear due to their weather resistant properties, account for a fifth of the 300 million tons of plastic produced globally each year (Geneva Environmental Network, n.d.). Made from petrochemicals, these plastic-derived synthetics have overtaken cotton as the foundation of textile production. Over 60% of all fashion products today are made from these nonbiodegradable fibers, 85% of which will be discarded after their use (Geneva Environmental Network, n.d.). This concept not only aims to showcase the importance of finding sustainable fashion solutions but exemplifies the protective measures we must take in order to conserve the beauty and delicacy of mother nature.



Figure 1: Curves of nature
Photo taken by Joshua Sagraves



Figure 2: Tent in Nature
Photo taken by Joshua Sagraves

Aesthetic Properties and Visual Impact: Made out of repurposed tent material, this National Geographic inspired mermaid dress utilizes strategic curvature of the seams at rounded areas of the body (i.e. bust, waste, and hips), to mimic the shapes we find in nature (Figure 1). Showcased at the front and back princess seams, these continuous lines run vertically and seamlessly through the bodice and skirt panels to reflect the ever-flowing course of nature. Black denier was used for the center panel pieces and olive for the side panels to provide further contrast between the colors and emphasize the shape of the body. Altogether, the disparity between technical nylon and the shaped seams aims to encourage synergy between our environment and the modern world, as well as highlight the measures we must take in order to maintain balance between the two.

Process, Technique, and Execution: Inspired by the photographs of ReRoute Media founder, Joshua Sagraves (Figure 2), this piece aims to mix high fashion style with the down to earth essence of nature (“Outdoor/Adventure,” n.d.). After studying the various technical components that make up a tent’s design, I experimented with silhouette and shape in addition to adding features like rods, zippers, bungee cords, and grommets for visual effect. In an effort to balance the understated beauty of our environment with the technical components of outdoor gear, I opted for a simplistic mermaid silhouette and minimal additions of tactical elements. This allowed more attention to fall upon the curved seam lines and overall statement I was trying to convey rather than impractical implementations. Before sourcing a tent to upcycle for my design, I constructed the 20-piece dress using an initial drape and perfected the panels using flat pattern techniques and multiple muslin fittings. Nylon samples were collected to test the fabric’s drapability and overall feel so I could implement a minimal waste approach during the construction process. After finding a reused tent and tarp to repurpose, I further studied its structure as well as the construction of corsets so I could evoke the essence of a tent’s build. Boning was inserted into a canvas underlayer for the bodice to allude to tent rods, which also allowed me to create a well-constructed frame for this design. After the bodice and skirt panels were sewn together, I hand cut seven, five-foot long strips of orange nylon to construct

decorative pieces of bias tape. Once pressed, these strips were sewn atop the joining seams at the front, back, and side. A 98% polyester and 2% spandex lining was added along with an invisible zip closure at the back. Lastly, cups were sewn into the constructed bust pieces and attached to the bodice.

Cohesion: This tent dress combines the use of multiple panels and curved seam lines to create a visual balance of technical camp gear and the humility of nature. The pieces work together to not only make a statement regarding the preventative measures we must take to save our environment but ignite a sense of action in the adventurer in us all.

Originality and Innovation: By creating a piece which is high fashion in its image yet outdoorsy in its demeanor, the goal is to abandon nature's humble voice to instead make a bold statement—the protection of our environment is more important than its destruction for the sake of fashion. All in all, this design utilizes materials intended to protect humans from natural elements to instead protect nature from the harmful effects humans can cause.

References

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