

Remember the Alamo

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Purpose: The purpose of this project was to create a jacket very similar to that worn by the by the Mexican army officers during the 1820s-1830s but with a slightly design twist through the use of vibrant purple accents. It was also an exploration in the combination of traditional embroidery techniques and chemical surface design techniques.

Process: The process began with visual research on military jackets and traditional military embroidery designs. Special focus was given to the jackets of General Santa Ana and Augustin de Iturbide of Mexico. Additional visual research was gathered from the Alamo and from various architectural elements around San Antonio, Texas. Sketches were developed from the gathered visual material and an initial design was chosen.

This was followed by further research on embroidery techniques. Various books on goldwork were consulted to identify the best techniques. Sources included both military and ecclesiastical styles (Antrobus & Preece, 1923; Dolby, 1867), dating as far back as the late 1800s.

At the same time, research was being done on how to distress metal embroidery materials. The designer was already planning on using 100% protein fibers for the garment as previous experiments had led to successful distressing. The question was whether the agents that affected the metal would further damage the fabric in excess. At last, it was decided that paints and dyes designed for metalworking artists would likely be the best answer as they would do less damage to the fabric. These particular paint colors could be mixed, sprayed, and worked with in a variety of ways. After some experimentation, it was discovered that they could be applied over acrylic texture compounds to create the appearance of corrosion, dirt, and build-up from age.

Wool melton was chosen for the shell of the jacket as it was an appropriate weight and fiber. The wool was dyed and heavily washed to create a more aged, lived in look. Heavy silk satin was chosen for the lining in order to keep with protein fibers, but allow the wearer to easily slide in and out of the jacket. The silk lining was acid dyed, but left uneven in color to create the appearance of wear. The French canvas for the structure was also dyed so that it would not show through the distressed areas of the jacket.



The jacket pattern was draped and transferred to pattern paper. Then the individual pattern pieces were traced on to extra-large vellum paper on which the embroidery design was drafted. Every layer of the embroidery was drafted and noted separately; requiring many very detailed technical design charts. Each piece, including the entire embroidery design was pricked with a pin to create a perforated pattern. Chalk pounce was then forced through the perforations to transfer the pattern and design to the wool. Afterwards, the fabric was stretched on slate-style frames for embroidery.



Techniques: The pieces were embroidered using a combination of traditional military-style goldwork and French couture embroidery techniques. This melding of styles included incorporating purple charmeuse appliques and a few other elements that would not be seen in a traditional military uniform. 100% Wool felt was used for the padding under the raised embroidery so that it would react to the distressing agents. Silk threads and silk appliques fabrics were used for the same reason.

After embroidering, the pieces were distressed using a lye solution, neutralized, and washed while still on the frame. Metal dyes and paints were applied with sprayers, sponges, and brushes to antique the bright gold. A combination of acrylic texturing mediums were used to create the appearance of corrosion and patina-colored paint was applied on top. The pieces were checked for any major chemical damage and repaired in manner meant to look rough as if completed by a soldier. Threads were left showing and at times, contrasting thread was used. After all the chemical techniques were completed, the pieces were once again washed and dried before removing them from the embroidery frames for assembly.

Materials: Wool melton shell, silk satin lining, gold bullion, gold purl, gold check, gold plate, gold spangles, silk embroidery thread, silk charmeuse, glass beads, leather, gold leaf, various cords, and braids are all seen on the surface of the jacket.

References

- Antrobus, M. S., & Preece, L. (1923). *Needlework in religion: The construction & decoration of altar clothing & of the vestments required in church services*. London: Pitman.
- Dolby, A. M. (1867). *Church embroidery: Ancient and modern*. London: Chapman and Hall.