

Frayed Elegance

Lynn M. Boorady, SUNY – Buffalo State, USA

Keywords: Denim, Sustainability, Upcycling

Americans consume 19 billion garments every year. Indeed, the consumption of clothing has increased significantly due to fast fashion and the constant changing of trends (Lapolla and Sanders, 2015). Clothing and household textiles make up 5.7% of all waste in landfills (EPA, 2015). US consumer purchase over 450 million pairs of jeans every year and, on average, every adult has seven pairs of jeans in their possession (Cotton Incorporated, 2013). The increase in the fast fashion retail model, such as Zara and H & M, has correlated with an increase in consumer waste in textiles.

Using post-consumer material lends itself automatically to artistic solutions and in this area, small independent designers take the lead. Nudie Jeans “Recycled Denim Maniacs” challenge chose young designers to reimagine old jeans into new designs. Junky Styling (UK) uses not only jeans but a variety of used garments, most notably men’s suits, in an eclectic style which has even been seen on the red carpet. Using post-consumer waste is handled differently by different companies – some tend to work with the original shape of the garment utilizing collars, cuffs and the like in new and different ways. Some companies deconstruct the garment, cut it up into uniform shapes and reconfigure into a new textile. The label km/a (Austria) shreds t-shirts, which have been pre-sorted by color, and uses the scrap (put back together through random surface stitching) for their jackets, skirts and tops.



The design concept was to explore an ethical alternative to feathers in an environmentally friendly manner. This design was inspired by feather treatments used in couture gowns by designers such as Givenchy, Jean Paul Gauthier and Serkin Cura’s Spring Summer 2015 show. Feathers are rarely associated with cruelty to animals yet, according to PETA (2015) the feathers are usually plucked from the animal while it is alive. This design research project illustrates an exploration using an alternative to feathers in an environmentally and ethical manner.

The base and lining of the bodice is a recycled sheet. The base was reinforced with interfacing to support the weight of the design. Strips of denim were cut into 1” by 3” rectangles and these were laid out to create an ombré design. Over 1200 strips were used to create the feather effect on the bodice. Starting at the bottom of the bodice, the strips of denim were sewn on individually in rows spaced .75” apart. There is an invisible

zipper closure in the back. The larger rectangles in the skirt echo the strips of fabric in the bodice. The hem sweep is over 300" or 12' long. It took 14 pairs of jeans to create this evening gown. Due to the weight of the garment, a waist stay was added to take some of the weight off the shoulders and make the garment more comfortable to wear.



Movement and color draw the eye to feather details and this inspired the denim strips and ombré effect. The ombré effect gives dimension to the design, starting with dark denim creating a strong shoulder (enhanced by the pleated and gathered cap sleeves) becoming lighter through the torso and ending with small sections of dark denim to ground the design. The larger rectangles in the skirt section echo the smaller strips of fabric on the bodice. The dress is machine washable and it will morph into a deconstructed state as the unfinished denim is washed repeatedly, thereby changing its appearance.

Positive attributes for sustainable design using post-consumer garments include the uniqueness of the garment, the focus on environmental friendliness, and the creativity required when working with limited and unusual shaped fabric sections. The process of turning something worn out and discarded into something new, useful and often beautiful can be a satisfying challenge for environmentally conscience designers.

Cotton Incorporated Lifestyle Monitor (January 16, 2013). *In with the old, in with the new*. Cotton Incorporated, Cary NC. Retrieved from <http://lifestylemonitor.cottoninc.com/tag/denim-market-share/>

Environmental Protection Agency. (May 2015). *Common Wastes and Materials – Textiles*. Retrieved from <http://www.epa.gov/osw/conserva/materials/textiles.htm>

Lapolla, K. & Sanders, E. B.-N. (February 2015). Using cocreation to engage everyday creativity in reusing and repairing apparel. *Clothing and Textile Research Journal*. (Published online before print) DOI: 10.1177/0887302X15572877

PETA (People for Ethical Treatment of Animals). (May 2015). *Animals used for clothing*. Retrieved from <http://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-clothing/industry/>