
Bonnie and Bye: A Braided Approach to Design

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Keywords: Textile Innovation, Couture Techniques, Sustainability

Dimension: 35 ½ x 28 x 38 ½

The **purpose** of this design was to test a framing mechanism for practice-based design that is dialogic, emergent and iterative. Developed during a semester-long experiment in design research, we initially sought a format to capture the fuzzy, messy creative process of sensemaking, (Hoysten, 2010). Collectively, we developed a framework called A Braided Approach to Framing Creative Process, expanding the existing model of creative scholarship established by Elizabeth Bye in 2010. The aim of our elaboration was to encompass collective gestures and to, through design research, dialog (mingle) with the literature as a means of honoring and contributing to it. The resultant design artifact is a tactile signature, interlacing apparel design, textile science, and historic costume scholarship.

Context: Bye's framework for apparel and textile design scholarship maps the process of creating output through actions of questioning, the contextual review, practicing, reflection, generating the artifact. We elaborate Bye's Framework for textile and apparel design scholarship to accommodate collaborative research by expanding a section for individual and shared contextual review. Graham Sullivan suggests viewing creative scholarship as a braid. We found this metaphor helpful in clarifying both the discrete parts and the iterations of the process within our design practice. The Braided model includes (a) Individual Interests/Histories as Researchers; (b) Individual Contextual Review; (c) Collective Reflection; (d) Shared contextual review; (e) Practice and (f) artifact. Dialog and reflection are built into each stage of practice.

Process: To test the model, we met in generative meetings, focusing on each stage of the braided model as listed above. As individuals we brought to the table a sincere passion for our respective disciplines: apparel design, textile design and historic costume, all key subfields that exist within the larger field of Textile and Apparel Studies. We were interested in what cross-pollination might look like *within* a discipline. We contextualized our interests through review of relevant literature, sharing through group discussion. Individual reviews explored topics ranging from zero-waste design techniques, cultural garments, design holdings within our historic costume collection as well as historic techniques to simulate fully-fashioned textiles. Through a process of collective reflection that incorporated journaling and sketching, we identified a design scenario inspired by the holdings of Bonnie Cashin: A no-waste overcoat, fully-fashioned out of leather or similar hide. A shared contextual review involved evaluating Bonnie Cashin's collection of hide and leather overcoats as well as reading and reviewing ephemera such as design briefs that illustrated her inspiration from cultural garments and use of hide and leather. In practice, Bonnie Cashin original oak tag production patterns were digitized into Optiex and modified to increase pattern efficiency. Fabric experimentation involved initial studies in leatherwork, felting of wool fiber and fulling cashmere fabric. A thick double-faced cashmere blanket fabric was sourced to serve both decorative and structural requirements, aesthetically mimicking Cashin's series of thick hide overcoats.

Garment pattern was plotted, a toile was created and evaluated. The pattern was revised. The final fabric was cut, basted and fulled supplementing roving as a binder. Closures were developed suggesting of the oversized handcrafted tassel closures featured on one Cashin design. All key design details were photographed (closures, components, stitching) and significant items of ephemera (fashion illustrations, design briefings) were documented digitally and archived on a collective design blog. The design artifact pays reverence to many key Cashin design elements. The blanket weight double-faced cashmere coat features an oversized fit, drop shoulders, modified dolman sleeve, oversized patch pockets. The coat is unlined with a raw self-fulled and faced finish.

Contribution: This design contributes to the continuing discourse seeking to “shape the tenets of design research” through practice. More importantly, this research embeds collaborative practice into the evolving canon of design research within our field as a valuable and valid approach to developing knowledge. Creative practice is “the site” of mentorship (traditional and reverse) to germinate and share ideas. The group collectively constructs new knowledge. Through the process of design research, we construct a common meaning system that is ongoing and related to collaborative group learning. We value cross-pollination and address the diversity of scholarship within textile and apparel studies. Collaborative efforts create shared values and bolster our unique strengths as a field.

Reference:

Bye, E. (2010). A new direction for clothing and textile design research. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 28(3), 205-217.

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Sullivan, G. (November 2009). *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in Visual Arts* (3rd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage Publications p. 104.

