

Fortuny with Flare and a Post-Modern Twist

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Measurements: Bust 38 ½", Waist 29", Hips 39"

**Contextual Review and Concept:** The human fascination with pleated textiles has existed from very early times with perhaps the oldest garment in existence being an Egyptian linen shirt with horizontally pleated sleeves, dated 3000 BC (Barber, 2004). From ancient to current time the interest appears to be pan-cultural with examples from cultural traditions in Europe, Middle East, Africa, multiple areas of Asia, and South America (Cousins, 2004). In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Mariano Fortuny created pleated silk dresses, the most famous of which was the Delphos dress inspired by the statue of the Charioteer of Delphi (DeOsma, 1994; Fukai, 2002; Kamitsis, 2004). The contemporary Japanese designer Issey Miyake has proliferated his pleated polyester clothing designs beginning in the 1970's and continuing to today (Wada, 2002). In the realm of academic scholarship pleated textiles and garment structures have been explored with the intent to continue the aesthetic spirit of Mariano Fortuny's Delphos designs, and to disseminate the technique used to create pleated folds in silk for contemporary wearable art garments (Sparks, 2004).

Fortuny was known for the beauty of the hand-dyed silk textiles which were produced in his Venice workrooms (DeOsma, 2004, pp. 100-101). From pictures one can discern that Fortuny's Delphos dresses were cut on straight grain, with the front hem slightly shorter than back hem which sometimes was extended to a small train of 10-12 inches in length. Often the Delphos dress was accompanied by a printed velvet coat in a harmonious color relationship with the dress. The coats were of varying lengths, with varying sleeve designs, and all appear to be cut on straight grain (DeOsma, 1994; Fukai, 2002; Kamitsis, 2004). In an inspection of two original Fortuny Delphos dresses, it was observed that all sewing was done by hand, and that each panel of the dresses was on straight grain and had selvedges intact which eliminated the need for edge finishing strategies. The pleat depth on both dresses ranged between ⅛" to ¼" (personal observation facilitated by Elizabeth Rhodes and Anne Bissonette at the Museum of the Fashion School at Kent State University, 2007). Presumably in an effort to protect his product, Mariano Fortuny did not record or share the strategy used to pleat the silk for Delphos dresses (DeOsma, 1994, p. 99).

The *concept* in this design submission was an art piece to be worn in the form of a long pleated evening dress with a flared coat, each digitally printed with an image derived from a photograph of rusty metal and peeling paint. The source of the photograph was an abandoned train car, and was used with the artist's permission. Digital printing rather than hand-dyeing the silk was chosen for environmental responsibility. The selection of an unorthodox image as subject matter for the print was done to infuse the ensemble with an unexpected and slightly humorous Post-Modern design approach.

**Aesthetic Properties:** The primary design elements implemented in this design are color, texture and shape. Within each design element the strategy of contrast is used to create visual impact. Color relationships within the photograph are complementary and of high intensity between the various reds to turquoises to chartreuse. There is variety in value structure between the mid-level reds to the dark loden green/brown areas of the rust-covered bolts in the photograph. The contrast in texture between the pleated evening dress and the smooth un-pleated silk coat is reminiscent of the Fortuny combination of coat and dress. In addition there is an interesting shift in the way the print appears between the coat and dress, as the pleating process reduces the width dimension of the fabric substantially. The columnar shape of the pleated silk dress was designed to contrast with the flare of the swing coat to create visual interest.

**Process and Technique:** The design process began with a series of sketches of the dress and coat, then moved to a Google search for 'rusty metal and peeling paint'. The image used in this design submission was selected, and the artist was contacted to request permission to use the image. With permission granted, the photograph was manipulated in Lectra Kaledo Print and Photoshop to derive the design used for the dress. The actual photograph was resized and used without manipulation for the coat. A flared coat pattern was draped in muslin, and the length

of the pattern pieces determined the size of the image to print. The pre-treated silk for the outer coat and lining were printed, steamed, and rinsed. Pattern pieces were carefully aligned on the silk so that the image would mirror or reflect accurately. The coat and lining were machine stitched, and hand finished around the armseye.

The rusty metal image was manipulated in Kaledo Print and Photoshop for the dress to create a 60" length. Three lengths of fabric were printed, steamed, rinsed and dried before pleating. An adaptation of the traditional Japanese Arashi Shibori technique was used to pleat the silk for the dress. This process is documented in pictures and verbal descriptions for the purpose of replication by future scholars (Wada, Y., Rice, M.K., & Barton, J., 1983; Wada, Y., 2002; Sparks, D., 2004). After the pleating process the silk was trimmed along the crest of a continuous pleat from top to bottom of the fabric. The panel for the godet was positioned at an approximate 45° angle to the straight-grain vertical pleats of the adjacent panel to mark the location of the seam on the diagonal pleats. Following the marking, a 1" strip of straight-grain silk organza was used to stabilize the diagonal pleats (each pleat was pinned to the organza on the inside of the dress). The straight pleat panel was hand-stitched to the diagonal pleat panel on the top side of the fabric. This process was repeated for the opposite side of the godet. The center front seam was stitched right-sides-together, and visually disappears into the vertical pleat structure. The orange silk yoke was stitched to the yoke lining at neck and armseye edges, then seams were trimmed, clipped, turned and pressed. The pleated silk dress was placed on a draping form, the yoke was positioned and marked with pins, then it was taken off the draping form, and the dress was trimmed to fit into the yoke structure. The yoke lining was hand-stitched to each pleat on the inside of the dress, and then the outer yoke was hand-stitched to each pleat on the outside or printed side of the dress. The dress hem was marked, trimmed and finished with a hand-rolled hem.

**Cohesion:** Essential to the success of a dynamic visual impression is the selection of vibrant artwork for the digital textile design. In this case, the bold strong colors of the rusty abandoned train photograph were the basis for many possibilities. The designer's intent was to create the appearance of an effortless combination of design elements, in garments that were visually graceful and would be easy to wear. In fact though, true to the couture tradition, a great deal of effort and skill were required to create the impression of an effortless, cohesive design.

**Design Contribution and Innovation:** This design submission continues the practice of hand-pleating textiles in keeping with aesthetic preferences from many cultures across the globe ranging back to ancient times. The work exists as part of a larger program of scholarly inquiry into the nature of pleated silk and how it can be manipulated. The shapes created in this design are subtly different than the ancient Greek or Fortuny Delphos dresses, by virtue of the flare incorporated into the design of each piece. The imagery used in the textile design is dynamic and different in tone or level of seriousness when compared to Fortuny's exquisitely printed Islamic-based ornamental textile designs. In this submission the designer's intent was to create a sense of playfulness. The lasting contribution in this submission rests in the demonstration that the aesthetic value of hand-pleated silk continues to be visually engaging and is viable as an approach to the creation of unique new surface designs and couture-level fashion.

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