

Phoenix Encircled by White Dragon

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Key words: Textile innovation, couture techniques, accessory

Measurements

Bust = 34.5 inches, waist = 25.5 inches, hip = 35.5 inches, length = 74 inches.

Design statement

Contextual review and concept.

Dresses are embedded in a cultural-historical context (Kaiser, 1993). People use symbols and transform symbolic meanings to realities by manipulating objects in their cultural worlds (Kaiser, 1993). Similarly, the designer of the current design used the same approach to transform cultural symbols into dress.

Dragon and phoenix are legendary creatures in Chinese mythology and they are cultural symbols (Mao, Wang, & Hong, 2012). Many fashion designers have focused on using geometry to create dramatic three dimensional effects (Rissanen, 2007). This design combines Chinese cultural symbols with three dimensional geometry to create a soft sculpture. Specifically, the purpose of the design was to 1) transfer Chinese cultural symbols into a dress and 2) explore geometrical shape to create cohesive art-wear.

Process, technique, and execution.

Four sketches were created and one was chosen to make a final garment. Five yards of a transparent polyester fabric and 40 yards of a white cotton fabric were used for the current design. The most difficult part was making a 3D Chinese dragon. The designer explored possible ways to make the dragon structure. After comparing the effects of PVC tube, bamboo, and wires, wires were chosen to make all the bones' structure. The dragon body and dragon head were constructed separately. Body bone and head skull structures were drawn and analyzed. After making the wired structure, the body and the head were filled with raw cotton fibers. The dragon body was constructed first. From the tale to the neck, the dragon belly was covered by various widths of folded long cotton stripes (e.g., 0.5, 1, 1.5, 2, and 2.5 inches) and the dragon back was covered with various sizes of cotton scales (e.g., 0.5, 0.75, 1, 1.25 inches, etc.). Different length of cotton fins (e.g., 2, 3, 4.5, and 6 inches) were constructed on the dragon back. The dragon head was covered by white cotton. Details were applied on the head, including hair, beard, teeth, eyes, nose, and horns. Finally, the dragon body and dragon head were constructed together.

Draping and flat pattern techniques were combined to make a long transparent dress. Elements from the Chinese phoenix were applied on the dress: wings were constructed on the top front and back, feathers were applied around the hip and dress hem. The wings were made from seven various sizes and shapes of fabric. The phoenix plumage was made from six layers of oval shape

cotton fabric of 3 different sizes (3, 6.5, and 10.5 inches). The edges of three layers of oval shape cotton fabric were cut to make a tassel-style feather. All of the six layers were slightly twisted and then constructed together to create a 3D effect.

Finally, the dress with phoenix elements and the dragon were combined together on a dress form, looking for balance and unity. Small details were adjusted.

Aesthetic properties and visual impact.

This asymmetrical garment design consists of three layers of designs: a transparent dress, a phoenix, and a Chinese dragon. A white dragon coiled around a transparent dress, which is decorated by phoenix feathers and wings. A contrast effect was created by the solid white cotton fabric and the transparent fabric. Hundreds of dragon scales and dozens of dragon fins were placed on the coiled dragon body, creating a flying, repetition, and rhythm pattern. Visually, the coiled 3D dragon, the phoenix plumes and wings, the contrast texture between solid cotton and transparent fabric, and the unique design shape created a harmonic design effect together.

Cohesion.

In summary, with design techniques and skills, the current design integrated symbols into a geometric shape to create aesthetic pleasant cohesive art-wear and successfully transformed cultural meanings into a dress.

Design contribution and innovation.

This design contributed to the current cultural-historical research on dress. The content of historical and social meaning of dragon and phoenix provided aesthetic and associative interpretations of the dress. This design also refined the current design techniques, for example, fabric manipulation methods on cotton. This design further contributed to a new original and innovative way of using cotton fabric. The design was significantly different from the existing design domain by showing how to make a three-dimensional cotton dragon.

Reference

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