



## *Guo Poem*

Weiwei Hong and Jean Parsons, University of Missouri

Keywords: Accessory, Non-Apparel 2-D, Ready-to-Wear

Measurements: 40inches (H) x 39inches (W) hung, Bust = 34 inches on form

### Mentor Statement

*Guo Poem* was created as the first design experiment in a creative problem-solving course for undergraduates. A course goal is to foster student creativity by developing innovative designs for gallery exhibition rather than for a target market. When freed from the need to identify a specific customer (other than one who purchases artwear), it allows creative expression that opens students up to finding inventive solutions to assigned design problems. As a design research based course, the goal is to understand and implement creative investigations to identify a design direction, develop written and visual proposals, and creatively merge surface design and garment form (Wong & Siu, 2012). The first project, titled Art (Wear) Off the Wall, starts with a problem statement to create an art piece that for the wall that can also be worn in one or more ways. My role is instructor and mentor for all enrolled students. For this project, the student was struggling with finding her own unique approach to her theme. After conversations, it became clear that she was also a bit homesick. I suggested she express these feelings through her design, looking for stories in her culture. This allowed her freedom to pursue a direction meaningful to her, but also a design that told a story that touched the whole class. This was chosen for submission due to the level of creative thinking, the quality of the hand calligraphy on the surface design, the wearability of the design, and the research process that went into solving the problem.

### Design Statement

I designed *Guo Poem* in response to an assigned design problem called Art (Wear) Off the Wall. The class as a whole and in small groups experimented with ways to approach the transition of a flat wall art piece to the body, including a group draping exercise where each person was allowed a turn to shape or change the piece as it evolved. My original inspiration for surface design was from an exhibition at the Metropolitan museum, *China: Through the Looking Glass*. In this exhibition, there were artifacts with Chinese elements, especially Chinese calligraphy, on the design that made the product unique and beautiful. I focused on the idea of putting Chinese characters on the garment as a surface design. In this way, the finished garment would be close to a Chinese calligraphy scroll when flattened but still have unique and interesting prints as a garment. Research included the many examples of Chinese calligraphy as used on cloth and apparel.

At the beginning, I considered using batik technique to create the print on the fabric. However, I found that this method would be quite complicated. Because it would be my first time doing so, there would likely be problems and I could not achieve the effect I wanted. Hence I decided to pursue the traditional way of creating Chinese calligraphy, which is to write by hand with a brush and ink, or in my case paint. There are several key factors for successful Chinese calligraphy, such as change of pressure when writing,

and the continuity between strokes. None of these can be achieved without using hand writing. With this in mind, my professor suggested that my design was still lacking story given that there are already quite a few designs that used Chinese calligraphy as an element. So I began to consider how to further amplify the design and make it my own. I realized that Chinese characters have many different styles and some characters of certain styles have a shape that may be able to fit on the body. After careful selection, I chose the character Guo in the Zhuan style. This was used for the development of the basic shape, as it could allow openings for the arms to go through (Figure 4).

For the content of the calligraphy, I chose a very famous story called Lan Ting Xu. This was originally written by one of the most famous calligraphers of ancient China, Wang Xizhi, in the year 353. He attended a gathering which was a kind of party called “Qu Shui Liu Shang” that was very popular at that time among artists, poets and celebrities. During such parties, people will sit by a little stream and put a little glass of wine on the water and let it flow along the stream. When the glass passes a person, he would pick up the wine, drink a little bit and compose an impromptu poem. All the poems composed would be recorded to create a poem collection and this article was the preface of the collection. Nowadays, people no longer remember what poems were written, but the calligraphy of this preface is still well-known even after more than a thousand years. This is the story I chose to tell on the surface of the design. It is a story that takes me back to my heritage.

Normal Chinese calligraphy uses a white background and black ink but I wanted to seek some difference. I choose to use a black fabric and golden fabric paint so that I can create the effect of a seal cutting on stone tablet which is another traditional format of Chinese calligraphy. Secondly, instead of putting all characters in straight columns at the same size, I decided to cut the whole paragraph into pieces and put them in different directions and sizes. Thus, the effect of fragments also achieves movement. Sheer pleated fabric was added in the cut-out portion of the garment shape that is the letter/character (Figure 2). I did this for two reasons; first to help fix the shape of the cut-out, and to create a blurred effect which is commonly seen in Chinese calligraphy. Finally, the shapes that the letter forms when flat also lend a sense of the flowing water that is described in the poem, and is accented by the pleated sheer fabric.

The vest was cut out first to be able to see and work around the shapes. All lettering was done by hand with a traditional brush and gold fabric paint, with the exception of one letter which was machine embroidered with gold thread as an accent. Inside edges were finished with a tight zigzag stitch. While most of the calligraphy is on the outside of the vest as it is also intended hang on the wall, the inside of the section forming a collar shape when worn has a portion of the story to frame the face (Figure 3). The design works as both a wall hanging, but is also dramatic when worn as a vest, combining texture, pattern and shape into one (Figures 2,3,4).

Wong, Y.L. and Siu, K. W. M. (2012). A model of creative design processes for fostering creativity of students in design education. *International Journal of Technology and Design Education*, 22, 437-450.



Figure 1. Front view



Figure 2. Back view



Figure 3. Alternate view



Figure 4. View as a wall hanging