

## Blue Nights: The Complexity of Grief

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“Memory fades, memory adjusts, memory conforms to what we think we remember.”

- Blue Nights, Joan Didion

**Contextual Review and Concept:** Grief is not a singular emotion, but is complex as it overwhelms you. It causes your mind to grapple with the memories of the loss. Those memories may fade in and out like waves, but each relationship is marked with objects that define it and these are the objects one remembers when someone or something is lost. For Didion, these objects were the stephanotis flowers her daughter wore on her wedding day, and the gaura and the Lily of the Nile flowers that grew in their home in California. The typical color associated with mourning is black, however, Didion uses the color of blue nights to convey the feeling of melancholy, nostalgia, memories, and time passing.

**Process, Technique, and Execution:** The coat was based on an Issey Miyake design and was created as an A-line coat with an oversized and stylized shawl collar. The collar is cut-on the front bodice and the facing is cut as a single piece. The fabric used is a white denim canvas. The shoulders were dropped to create a softer silhouette and the sleeves are 2-piece sleeves. The coat is unlined, so most of the seams incorporated flat-felled finishes.

The cyanotype (photographic blueprint) was invented in 1842, as an alternative way to printing photographs (Turner et al., 2014). To produce the Prussian blue color in the cyanotype, potassium ferricyanide and ferric ammonium citrate are mixed together (Turner et al., 2014). When the cyanotype process is exposed to ultraviolet light, photo-activation occurs. Prussian blue can be used to dye natural fibers when the chemical process takes place.

To begin with, the white denim canvas was cut into 5 panels of 40”x60”. These panels were all soaked in the prepared reactants. The fabric panels were left to completely dry in a dark room. The negative transparent print was created using pictures of the flowers Didion alluded to in her text - stephanotis, gaura, and Lily of the Nile. The images were manipulated in Photoshop before being printed out on acrylic film. The final negative transparent print measured 40”x60” (see Figure 1). Once the 5 fabric panels were dry, they were laid out in direct sunlight and the negative transparent print was laid on top of each one for a total of 5 minutes, to initiate the cyanotype process (see Figure 2). This process was repeated with each of the fabric panels. The last part of the process involved dipping the fabric panels into water that mixed with hydrogen peroxide. This created a deep blue color except for the places where the negative transparent

print was dark (see Figure 3). The 5 panels were then cut into the different parts of the coats and the construction of the coat commenced.



**Figures 1-3:** Negative transparent print, exposure with negative on fabric, and the final result on fabric panel.

**Design, Contribution, and Innovation:** We used cyanotype, an old photographic printing method, as a novel technique for surface design on fabric. In addition, the photographic quality of the cyanotype print combined with memories of flowers captured how a person experiences memories during grief. In the future, we plan to explore more commercial applications of cyanotype. In addition, we want to explore tinting cyanotype prints to achieve different colors such as sepia, black, yellow. The use of different colors would allow us to capture different moods and memories in garment form.

### References

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- Turner, J., Parisi, A. V., Downs, N., & Lynch, M. (2014). From ultraviolet to Prussian blue: a spectral response for the cyanotype process and a safe educational activity to explain UV exposure for all ages. *Photochemical & Photobiological Sciences*, 13(12), 1753-1764.



