



## SCAR-RED

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Wearable art, no waste, experimental, surface design

Despite the common misperception that heart disease is primarily a man's disease (Ehrenreich 1983), the startling truth is that even more women die of cardiovascular disease (CVD) than men (Rosamond et al, 2008). CVD affects both men and women; however, recent studies demonstrate distinctive gender differences in the manifestation of the disease (Chen 2005, Patel, 2004). Women are also caught in a double jeopardy bind: they may be the primary caregivers for their family whose needs usually come before their own. Thus early warning signs and symptoms may be ignored or neglected because they are inconvenient to busy schedules and competing demands (Womanheart n.d.) In 2002, the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) launched *The Heart Truth*® campaign (The Heart Truth n.d.) to promote awareness of women's CVD, developing the *Red Dress*® as a national symbol for women and heart disease awareness. Subsequently, the American Heart Association adopted the red dress symbol as a logo for its own campaign, *Go Red for Women*® (Go Red n.d.). After more than fifteen years of ongoing *Red Dress*® campaigns geared to women, CVD is still the leading cause of death for women, only 50% of women are aware of this, and mortality is increasing in younger women with heart disease (Mochari-Greenberger 2012). Women of color are also lagging behind white women in surveys showing health trajectories, knowledge and awareness (Lutfiyya 2008). These facts suggest that traditional methods of promoting awareness of CVD may not be working as effectively as they could be in raising awareness or changing behaviors. While the *Red Dress*® is familiar to everyone associated with these campaigns, the primary reach of these organizations are fashion shows and women's magazine articles during the heart health month of February. A red dress is an ambiguous symbol at best, loaded with historical implications of sex and sin. Even though the symbol was adopted over 15 years ago, I first learned about the significance of CVD through a student project at UC Davis.

Adele Zhang, a lecturer in Design and Dr. Amparo Villablanca, Director of the Women's Cardiovascular Medicine program at UC Davis have worked with fashion students each year since 2010 to create red dresses that are personally inspired by each student's own story or interpretation of CVD. While I was aware of this project I didn't really understand the scope of the problem until someone I knew well, who was younger than me, collapsed on her bathroom floor and went into a stroke induced coma; she died five days later. This motivated me to create a collection of sculptural red dresses to help promote awareness of heart disease risk in women. *Scar-Red* is a statement about women post heart surgery when although all the pieces are put back together the scar always remains.

The garment is composed of unusual shapes that are pieced together in an elegant yet unconventional pattern design. The light reflective qualities of the silk charmeuse fabric enhance the form created by randomly sized fabric pieces. The garment drapes to the body through the bias cut. The fabric is all recycled cut waste from one of my former students, Faizan Dar, who hand printed all of his fabrics on silk charmeuse with reactive dyes for his undergraduate final collection. Knowing of my interest in repurposing waste, he gave me a bag of his cut scraps which were primarily in shades of yellow, green, and red with interesting surface design markings as excavations of his beautiful textile prints. For this garment I overdyed all of the scraps in a scarlet red fiber reactive dye bath. The varying shades of red in the finished garment are due to the overdyer process. Using a no waste process, I utilized the scraps as they were and stitched them together with a Mero machine, draping them on a dress form as I worked until the garment looked aesthetically pleasing. The closure for donning and doffing is a series of snaps in the back of the garment. The only additional embellishments are the gold thread ties in the front of the garment as a reference to surgical sutures used in open heart surgery. They are placed prominently on the front of the garment as a visible reminder that most women who have undergone heart surgery live with long noticeable scars on their chest.

This garment is cohesive in that it is well balanced while at the same time asymmetrical. The drape of the bias cut silk charmeuse allows the garment to hang elegantly on the body; the conceptual message is inherent through the

color red and the “suture” embellishments on the front; additionally the back is open as a subtle reference to a hospital gown.

This piece is part of a collection that aims to promote awareness of women’s cardiovascular disease, the number one killer of women. A key element of this collection is making visible what is often invisible, not only the disease itself but also the stigma of a disease that may be exasperated by personal lifestyle choices. *Scar-Red* utilizes the unusually shaped cut textile waste from other garments and incorporates the odd shapes into the garment design through an innovative draping process. The waste material of the garment is also a subtle reminder that heart disease, which is often preventable through behavioral changes, is also a waste.

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