

## Black Coffee Gossip

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### Design Mentor Statement

This work was a class project in my creative design processes class. Students were challenged to incorporate two or more fabric manipulation techniques into a wearable art ensemble based on their design research. Each student engaged in an extensive design research process, seeking information from a variety of visual, verbal, 2D, and 3D sources. From the research, students created 20 sketchbook pages, juxtaposing images and text from a wide range of sources with their own inspiration sketches. Each student created a mood board (Figure 1), their patterns, first sample, and final ensemble. Students were mentored with formative feedback at two points during the design research process as well as throughout the creation process. I selected to submit this student's work because it has a very strong concept. The student has really thought about how to visually represent the different ways in which the concept—the dangers of gossip—can be interpreted by the viewer of the piece. The student also did high-quality work, putting much effort into the patternmaking, figuring out the supporting inner construction and hours of work on the fabric manipulation techniques. The outcome is striking and thought-provoking.

### Statement of Purpose

**Purpose and context.** In my design research process, I found the poem *Black Coffee* by Gould (1949). "Smiling sweetly, respected trulls / Drinking coffee from polished skulls. / A touch of arsenic, 'One lump, or two?' / And the cups go round with their deadly brew. / The Atomic Bomb is an awesome thing / But so is woman . . . / Gossiping!" I sought to convey the meaning and feelings of this poem in a three-dimensional piece of wearable art. The intent of this design was to create a garment that reflects a societal issue or norm: gossiping. I wanted to bring awareness to this issue and give the intangible a presence that is thought provoking. I wanted to create something worthy of someone's time to analyze and see the story within it at a closer glance. Finally, I wanted to give the audience freedom to interpret the garment as they see fit.

**Aesthetic properties and visual impact.** The aesthetic properties of this design are inspired by the poem, giving life to words that link gossiping to the everyday act of drinking coffee. Visually, this submission is showing the contrasting sides of gossiping and coffee drinking. One side being very straight,



Figure 1 Mood Board

black, and lacking motion; representing a coffee cup. The other side being longer, lighter, with more movement; representing the foam/coffee spilling out. Alternatively, this submission can also be seen as a face, embroidered into the black side of the garment, with the other side representing the gossip that is spewing out of the mouth. Other aspects of this garment can also be seen by the viewer, creating a multidimensional design that can be viewed in many facets.

Process, technique, and execution. Black Coffee Gossip began as a combination of elements and materials, driven by the initial inspiration and mood board. Black and white colors were chosen due to their strong contrast and the pale brown cafe au lait color, was chosen for its literal representation of creamy coffee. To represent the coffee cup on the right side of the garment, a layer of black vinyl was attached to red faux leather to create a rigid structure. The layers were machine quilted to create the abstract and repeated face shape (Figure 2). To represent the spilling foam and coffee on the left side of the garment, over 28 yards of large piping was crocheting into a chain. The chain was hand-stitched in multiple layers to a mesh underdress. Additionally, cafe au lait crepe fabric seeps out from under the crochet foam onto the floor, giving more texture and depth to the overall design (Figure 2). This garment required great amounts of hand sewing and fabric manipulation throughout the creation process. Detailed features and techniques aided in the intriguing and artistic execution of this garment.



Figure 2 Internal structure and external surface design

Cohesion. Deriving itself from the “Black Coffee” poem, with further inspiration explored in the mood board, each element of Black Coffee Gossip began with inspiration from an actual cup of coffee. The coffee cup structure is shown in the black, stiff design of the garment, with a rim over the shoulder. The coffee is shown spilling out on to the floor, with foam spilling from the top and the cafe au lait coffee (crepe fabric) seeping underneath it. With gossip starting from the mouth, the open-mouthed faces on the ‘coffee cup’ are fitting. The ‘foam’, or ‘gossip’ is then coming out of the mouth and spilling onto the floor as well. As the “Black Coffee” poem makes references to “smiling sweetly” and “atomic bomb”, the comparison between the calm and chaos are also shown in the design. With the chaos of gossip hidden behind a sweet smile, or coffee cup, this is shown in the contrasting sides of the garment. Giving the viewer two different sides of gossiping, and the garment, to interpret.

Innovation. Through this garment a poem is innovatively interpreted as multidimensional wearable art. With all design aspects deriving itself from the “Black Coffee” poem, different interpretations can be made through the poem and garment itself. This allows the audience to explore different conclusions within themselves and explore the aspect of gossiping that is often considered normal today. This freedom of interpretation is stimulating for the audience’s mind and encourages exploration of ideas, furthering discussions of the topic.

References

Gould, M. (1949). *Black Coffee*. Gossip. Retrieved from  
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