

Lady of the Lake

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Lady of the Lake is an artistic appreciation for the beauty of Lake Michigan and Hamlin lake, which is located near Ludington, Michigan. The design process began when artist Dick Bourgault of Ludington, Michigan, took photos around Hamlin lake while taking an early spring walk with his wife. These pictures were posted on social media and the author of this endeavor found them fascinating. After obtaining permission from the artist, the photos were used to create a two-piece womenswear ensemble.

Hamlin lake is a man-made lake that was once used for holding logs during for a sawmill built by Charles Mears. The lake is part of the Big Sable River, which originally emptied into Lake Michigan. Charles named the artificial lake after Hannibal Hamlin who was Abraham Lincoln's vice president choice ("History of the Village," 2016). The community of Hamlin became a busy village during the late 1870s and was driven by the business produced by Charles Mears. The dam collapsed twice and washed away much of the original settlements. After the lumber industry slowed, a permanent dam was constructed in 1914 and the community became a resort location (Hamlin, 2016).

The original photographs taken by artist Dick Bourgault focused on the shimmer and ripples on the waters of Hamlin lake. He was experimenting with different camera settings and preparing for photo sessions for the upcoming summer season. These photos were first taken into Adobe Photoshop and were recolored for a high fashion aesthetic. The natural greens and browns were replaced with saturated blues to convey the sense of water. After applying filters to the photographs, the files were then put into a repeat using Lectra's Kaledo Print Suite. The prints were then produced on a light weight silk habotai material using a digital textile printer. By producing a natural effect using technology, this kept the garment in the theme of Hamlin lake. The printed fabric was steamed for an hour to ensure permanency before being hand washed for five minutes and line dried.

The silhouette was inspired by a classic Balenciaga dramatic A-line shape that emphasizes volume. It was first used for outerwear before becoming a dress silhouette in the 1950s (Walker, 2006). This silhouette became the top part of the two-piece ensemble. The side seams of the top have a contrasting print created from one of the manipulated photos inserted to ensure volume. The skirt was styled after traditional pencil skirts and kept simpler as to not compete with the drama of the top portion. The skirt's print was produced on cotton canvas and is paired with a stretch neoprene. The print is the same used on the side inserts of the bodice, but moved vertically and mirrored. This was done to reference the mirror quality of water as it reflects everything on its surface.

The pattern pieces for *Lady of the Lake* were draped and then transferred to pattern paper. The upper front and back bodice pieces were then digitized and uploaded to Lectra's Modaris software. The files for both pattern pieces were then opened in Adobe Illustrator where the outline of Hamlin Lake was applied. This outline was etched into soft white calf leather using a laser cutter on both the front and back bodice pieces. The laser cutter then cut the pattern pieces from the leather. The creation of Hamlin Lake using natural materials and technology maintained the theme of the very lake itself.

Inspired by the sustainable technique used by designer Holly McQuillan, the hem of the top was sealed using paint to prevent fraying (Rissanen, & McQuillan, 2016). For this garment, a textile fabric medium that is heat set was chosen in a bright silver to draw upon the inspiration of sunlight against the water. This textile medium draws the eye to the hem which was cut with a ripple pattern inspired by the fabric print. The hem was painted by hand at half an inch before allowing to seal for an hour. After drying, the fabric's hem was ironed on the opposite side on the silk heat setting to ensure longevity. The hem was then trimmed down to a quarter inch to create a fine couture inspired hem.

The top of the ensemble was cut and side seams serged to ensure unraveling. The hem was hand painted to maintain the simplicity of the ripple inspired edging. Where each side seam met the hem, it was folded into an arrow head shape and tacked down by hand to avoid showing past the hem's edge. The laser cut upper bodice pieces were attached and top stitched to secure the seam allowance. The under-arm portion of the armscye of the printed fabric was hand painted to avoid unraveling and harmonized with the hem of the top. These areas were given time to dry before heat sealing with an iron and trimming to give a clean edge.

The skirt was constructed to contour to the curves of the body. One printed panel was placed at center front and two at center back where an invisible zipper is located. Neoprene panels are located on each side of the printed panels to place stretch where it is needed in terms of body contours and movement. All seams involving the neoprene were clipped, and then turned towards the side seam before top stitching. A facing was created to finish the waist line of the skirt.

Swarovski hot fix crystals were applied to the front and back leather laser cut pattern pieces to represent the twinkle of sunlight against moving water. The crystals were chosen based on color to represent the water and were placed on the land side of the laser etching. This placement was done to avoid having too many crystals in the small space between the neckline and the end of the laser etching. The crystals are set in descending color story from lightest and ending with the darkest of crystals to illustrate the depth of Hamlin Lake.

The Lady of the Lake is an aesthetic appreciation of Michigan's natural and man-made beauty. The people that have shaped the state is what makes it a gorgeous place to live. The photos by artist Dick Bourgault perfectly captured the essence of this natural beauty and inspired a whimsical interpretation. The piece also serves as a reminder that we need to take care of the Earth or else we will truly miss out on future inspirations to enjoy.

References

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