

Life After Death

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Fashion designers are putting forth innovative ideas about how we look at clothing we deem “dead” or no longer useful, to give it a second life. They continue to explore methods of creating new garments from post-consumer waste; transforming used, stained, and damaged clothing into new and aesthetically pleasing garments (Ohrn-McDaniel, 2014; Hwang, 2013; Doty, 2012)

The purpose of *Life After Death* was to (1) explore using the seam allowances and hems from Eileen Fisher garments that are difficult to repurpose in the creation of new textiles and (2) create a fully biodegradable garment using only natural textiles and threads that could be composted after use. Inspiration was taken from rock formations found in the rural Flint Hills of Kansas and the cyclical nature of life, decomposition, death and rebirth.

The vest was created by sewing one-inch-wide channels through two pieces of silk organza, with water dissolvable stabilizer in-between the two layers. The stabilizer provided for improved sewing tension and for better control of the silk organza when feeding it through the sewing machine and was washed away after the channels were finished being sewn. The vest pattern was then cut out of the silk organza and cotton, linen, rayon, and silk seam allowances and hems from deconstructed second hand garments were used to stuff the channels. This created a striated effect in the garment, emulating the Kansas rock formations. The edges of the vest were finished using an overlock machine with 100% silk thread. The underdress was created from 100% silk charmeuse and the edges finished with a hand rolled hem. The dress design crisscrosses in the front to eliminate the need for a metal or plastic closure which would not be biodegradable.

Life After Death contributes to knowledge about how to create new textiles from second hand clothing. It offers new solutions for problematic seam allowances and hems left over from deconstruction processes of second hand garments. This piece is part of a fashion design installation that explores techniques using post-consumer waste from discarded clothing and food scraps. Exploration is especially focused on utilizing material from a fiberizing machine, which feeds cloth through revolving steel brushes to take second hand garments back down to their original fiber state (Lewis, Park, Netravali, & Trejo, 2016). White, cream, and gray secondhand garments are deconstructed and recreated into new textiles through fiberizing, felting, hand spinning, weaving, knitting, sewing and by combining reclaimed clothing with new textiles for stability and improved aesthetics.

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