

### Over Underworld

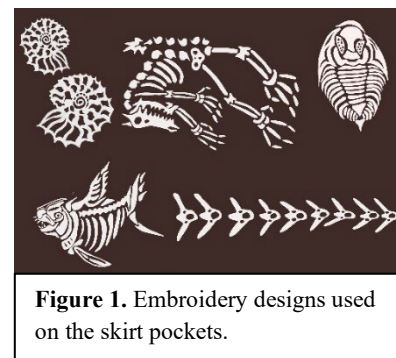
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**Contextual review and concept statement.** Clothing inhabits an interesting and at times contradictory space. We adorn garments with images and motifs created in explicitly two-dimensional mediums, yet the garments themselves are distinctly three-dimensional objects, morphing to occupy the spaces filled by our bodies (Harris, 2020). Through this morphing, those images expand their constraints and can become something like a two-and-a-half dimensional form, torn between worlds and suspended in this curious position (Xu & Zhong, 2003). *Two-and-a-half dimension* is a phrase employed by artists such as Marcus Harvey to describe the “doorway between wall-based painting and sculpture” (Harvey, 2011, p.1). This morphic role of imagery on clothing has been accelerated in the past few decades, as one of the primary ways that we perceive fashion objects, evolving from still images in fashion catalogues to full-motion digital videos, allowing us to conceptualize the movement and life of a garment before we ever see it physically (Khan, 2015).

Though the ubiquity of images on clothes may desensitize us, it can be productive to remind us of the image’s strange role on clothing, such as expressing identity, social engagement, and communication (Gurung et al., 2019). This design project was an exercise in awareness for that strangeness, aiming to refresh the symbolism of our clothing by tapping into childhood memories (Gilman, 2002). Two major goals were pursued when conceptualizing this look: (1) merging the imagery on the garments and creating a physical scene that the viewer and wearer could imagine themselves inhabiting, and (2) using the wearer’s body to bend the rules of two-dimensional images, capitalizing as much as possible on the two-and-a-half-dimension concept. The inspiration came from browsing children’s sweaters shown in a Knitwear course, with three-dimensional details and all around the body designs. The designer aimed to use every thread as a piece of a scene, forming not just a doll house, but a sky, a grassy lawn, and a mysterious underground, all brought together in a comfortable, conversational, fun, and ageless outfit.

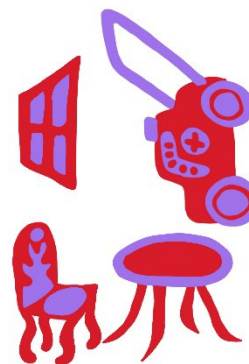
**Process, technique, and execution.** The design process started with gathering images that were manipulated to be made as embroideries and integrated along with intarsia knitting technique into a two-piece outfit. A long pencil skirt was planned to act as the underground of a sweater, turning the wearer’s body into a cross section, something only possible in two-dimensional planes. A dark brown double-knit fabric made of 100% polyester provided enough stretch for comfort but stability for applying embroidery onto it. Since the final placement of the images was dependent on the final size of each garment piece, a plain tube skirt was first assembled, with elastic waistband, and the embroidery motifs were cut out and made into several applied pockets around the skirt (Figure 1). The intentional wide seam



**Figure 1.** Embroidery designs used on the skirt pockets.

allowances and zig zag stitching to apply the pockets aimed to provide texture to the skirt, suggesting the crumbled look of underground.

An imagery dollhouse with blue sky and smoke coming out of the chimney, the smoke becoming an entire sleeve was the starting point of the sweater. Therefore, the yarn colors were chosen in a “color between these lines” manner, picking yarns by color and texture. The dollhouse has a three-dimensional look, with slanted side walls knitted with intarsia technique, using textured laceweight cashmere yarns on a flatbed, standard gauge, Silver Reed knitting machine. The outline of the house was shaped on the machine, then the house was applied onto the sweater, which was knitted separately on a bulky flatbed machine, using 100% acrylic yarns. The placement of the house had to be coordinated with the placement of the intarsia knitted smoke and the grass strip on the front of the sweater. Given the natural shape of the two garments as tubes, the scene aimed to be created became an infinite loop, where a creature living within this scene would be able to walk in what seems to be a perfectly straight line and soon arrive back where it started. To reinforce these new rules or reality, a lawn mower was embroidered and applied to the back of the sweater, with a fresh strip of light green yarn for the cut grass knitted starting in the front of the sweater, and connecting to the back, a strip which would soon be made into a complete ring when the mower completes its route. Doll house objects were embroidered separately on the skirt fabric and applied on the sweater using the same zigzag stitch used for the skirt pockets (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Embroidery designs on the sweater.

**Cohesion and aesthetics properties.** The ensemble is an attractive conversational piece, that engages the viewer through contrasts in color, texture, and shape that are thoughtfully arranged to tell the intended story. The constant play on the line quality, from the chunky V-shaped knit stitches to the zig-zag seams and organic looking, though precisely engineered, embroidery lines on the skirt, shows a rich repertoire of design and technical skills. The extra-long sleeves on the sweater add playfulness to the silhouette, guiding the viewers attention to the underworld details. The next to the hem pocket at the back of the skirt is the designer’s invitation into the fun scene he has created, a two-and-a-half-dimension experience. Despite the wide range of design elements and contrasts, there is a balance and calm within the look, achieved by the proportions of color and edge finishing details.

**Design contribution and innovation.** This project adds to the body of interdisciplinary creative scholarship, merging art and fashion, showing how using imagery and integrating various technologies and garment making techniques can lead to innovative garments that are not to be “consumed”, but rather preserved as engaging story books.

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