

Josephine Knot: A Wearable Basket

Casey R. Stannard and Jeremy Bernardoni,
Louisiana State University and University of North Texas

Keywords: basketry, Josephine knot, historic reference, draping

The present design incorporates a basketry technique called a Josephine knot. This knot is made by interlacing multiple layers of round reed. After exiting the knot, the reeds serve as spokes for weaving the basket. Oftentimes, a Josephine knot is utilized as the handle detail for a shallow basket, like a flower basket (see Fig. 1).



Fig 1.: Josephine knot.
(Schaeffer, 2016).

The first designer has been exploring the use of basketry techniques in wearable art (Stannard, 2022). Basketry techniques using reed have been very rarely used by designers of wearable art, a notable exception being the Balmain Spring 2023 runway show which featured rattan panels (Vogue Runway, 2023). Chang (2005) also explored coiled basketry techniques in wearable art. To the designers' knowledge, a Josephine knot created from reed has not been utilized for wearable art and was the impetus for this design.

The Josephine knot led to a secondary source of inspiration, Empress Josephine. Historical reference has long been used as a conceptual framework for apparel design (e.g. Armstead, 2019; Parsons, 2015), thus, it was deemed appropriate for the present work. Empress Josephine was the first wife of Napoleon Bonaparte, general and eventual emperor of France from 1804-1814. Empress Josephine was seen as a tastemaker and fashion icon in the early 19th century (Jensen, 2017). She promoted the neoclassical style of columnar, empire-wasted gowns made from lightweight fabrics (sometimes nearly sheer) that were often done in white (Jensen, 2017; Viel, 2015). In the famous painting of the empress (see Fig. 2) by Andrea Appiani (1807), Josephine is wearing a neoclassical gown with a standing lace collar (Viel, 2015). This painting, particularly the columnar white gown and gesture of the standing lace collar, was a major inspiration for the current piece. Thus, the purpose of this design was to create a contemporary

The Josephine knot led to a secondary source of inspiration, Empress Josephine. Historical reference has long been used as a conceptual framework for apparel design (e.g. Armstead, 2019; Parsons, 2015), thus, it was deemed appropriate for the present work. Empress Josephine was the first wife of Napoleon Bonaparte, general and eventual emperor of France from 1804-1814. Empress Josephine was seen as a tastemaker and fashion icon in the early 19th century (Jensen, 2017). She promoted the neoclassical style of columnar, empire-wasted gowns made from lightweight fabrics (sometimes nearly sheer) that were often done in white (Jensen, 2017; Viel, 2015). In the famous painting of the empress (see Fig. 2) by Andrea Appiani (1807), Josephine is wearing a neoclassical gown with a standing lace collar (Viel, 2015). This painting, particularly the columnar white gown and gesture of the standing lace collar, was a major inspiration for the current piece. Thus, the purpose of this design was to create a contemporary

wearable art piece using the Josephine knot basketry technique and historical reference inspiration from the fashions and life of Empress Josephine.

Aesthetics

Aesthetics were carefully considered in the design. A columnar silhouette was chosen to refer to the neoclassical styles worn by Josephine. The design relies heavily on curvilinear lines (in the knot, long spokes, and seamlines) which create rhythm throughout the piece. White was chosen to embody the inspiration and it was contrasted with black to create interest and move the eye around the design. Additionally, the hem was bound in black ribbon to create unity with the black basket element and black waist bow.

Methods

To begin the design process, the first designer started by creating a Josephine knot from 10 round reeds (size #3). The reeds were soaked in water until pliable and then interwoven to create the knot. After the knot was created, the reeds were spread to create the spokes for weaving the basket. Six rows were twined using smaller reeds (size #2) on either side of the knot. Additional spokes were inserted into these rows to widen the basket. Next, ¼” flat reed was used to weave each side. As the basket grew, the designer would hold the shape against a plastic-wrapped dressform to see if the emerging shape would be successful in fitting over the bust. The goal was to create a breast plate-like structure and epaulet that would suggest armor as Josephine only came to her throne through her husband’s military success. Once the size of the breastplate was sufficient, each spoke was trimmed and tucked into the weaving. To emulate the gesture of the empress’ lace collar and add drama, the reeds on the epaulet portion of the basket which goes over the shoulder were left long. The basket was then wet and shaped by hand to the dress form. It was tied to the dressform with elastic bands and allowed to dry for several days. Once complete, the basket was spray painted with black lacquer, and black beads were glued to each long spoke end. These beads recalled the royal nature of the Empress and functionally kept the reeds from ripping the dress.

The dress for this design was draped on the form following the creation of the basket. The second designer marked with tape where the basket was situated on the form. Next, using a sheer fabric the dress was draped with cross-body seams. An empire waistline would have



Fig. 2: Empress Josephine. (Appiani, 1807).

related more to the inspirational figure, however, the designers wanted to create a more contemporary look for the present piece. Fullness was added at one hip to visually balance the basket element. A black ribbon bow was added at the hip to highlight this interesting draping feature. A Balenciaga-style back, wherein fullness was added at the waist seam, was also incorporated to complement the shape of the bead-tipped reeds at the back of the piece.

The dress was created using 100% nylon chiffon and lined with 100% polyester lining. The two bodice pieces containing fullness were stitched to corresponding carriage pieces to control the fullness. Then the garment was assembled with French seams. An invisible zipper was added to one side to allow entry. The hem was bound with a black ribbon to complete the look. Finally, the basket was hand tacked to the finished gown at key locations.

Cohesion

The goal of this design was to create a contemporary wearable art piece using the Josephine knot basketry technique and inspiration from Empress Josephine. The Josephine knot was created using round reeds which flowed into an exaggerated armor-inspired breastplate and epaulet basket. The basket was painted with black lacquer to correspond to the dress details. A second goal was to use the neoclassical look of Empress Josephine as inspiration for the dress element of the design. White chiffon was used to create the columnar gown which echoed the historical style of interest. Gathering was added at the waistline to recall Josephine's puff sleeves in the painting.

Contribution

The present work builds on the first designer's past explorations of wearable basketry (Stannard, 2022). Couture house, Balmain, did explore ratan (a type of basketry) in their Spring 2023 line (Vogue Runway, 2023). However, the basketry elements were mainly flat garment sections (like center front panels of dresses) or sleeve elements. To the designers' knowledge, a Josephine knot basket has not been utilized within wearable art. The additional use of historic references to Empress Josephine is another unique contribution of this piece. Knowledge gained from this design includes the shaping of wet basket elements to the plastic wrap-covered dressform to create fit and the visual effect created by leaving the long reeds at the back as a design feature. The design also serves as an example of using historical references for contemporary design inspiration. Future research to be undertaken by the design team is to create more wearable baskets using historic figures as inspiration. Other designers should learn and utilize basket weaving techniques to create future pieces of wearable art.

References

- Appiani, A. (1807). *Josephine Reine d'Italie* [Painting]. Chateau de Malmaison. Paris, France.
<https://www.napoleon.org/en/magazine/places/national-museum-of-the-chateau-de-malmaison/>
- Armstead, C. (2019, December 15). *Eacles Imperialis 1909 evening gown* [design]. International Textile and Apparel Association Annual Conference, Las Vegas, NV.
<https://doi.org/10.31274/itaa.8811>
- Chang, L. A. (2005). Excellence in design: Red hot. *Clothing & Textiles Research Journal*, 23(3), 203-205.
- Jensen, H. B. (2017). Parures, pashminas, and portraiture, or, how Josephine Bonaparte fashion the Napoleonic Empire (pp. 36-59). In J. De Young (Ed.). *Fashion in European art: Dress and identity, politics, and the body 1775-1925*. Bloomsbury.
- Llácer Viel, T. (2015). The empress of the French: Iconography of Joséphine de Beauharnais. *Potestas Estudios del Mundo Clásico e Historia del Arte*, 8, 241-264.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.6035/Potestas.2015.8.10>
- Parsons, J.L. (2015). Historical patents as inspiration for digital textile and apparel design. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 33(4), 280-296.
- Schaeffer, S. (2016, October 30). Josephine knot. *Baskets and more...* <http://swschaeffer-baskets.blogspot.com/2016/10/josephine-knot.html>
- Stannard, C. (2022). *Wearable basket* [design]. International Textile and Apparel Association Annual Conference, Denver, CO. <https://doi.org/10.31274/itaa.15753>
- Vogue Runway (2023). Balmain spring 2023 ready-to-wear. Vogue Runway.
<https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2023-ready-to-wear/balmain/slideshow/collection#1>



