

New Beginnings

Cecilie Nielsen and Ashley Rougeaux-Burnes,
Texas Tech University

Key Words: Surface Design, Natural Dye, Cultural Reference

Mentor Statement: The purpose of this mentorship relationship was to assist Apparel Design and Manufacturing students in exploring global events/issues to develop interculturally competent citizens. A studio-based class of apparel design students were challenged to research the Russia-Ukraine war and utilize the information found to create a business plan for a hypothetical company affected by the war and construct a garment speaking to the effects of the war. In response to the prompt given, the student designer in this study chose to focus on improving the workers' environment by utilizing natural dyes. This ensemble was chosen for submission to the International Textiles and Apparel Association conference exhibition due to the student's strong construction skills and incorporation of surface design techniques. The student's choice to create a gender-neutral garment also makes the ensemble marketable to a larger audience.

Statement of Purpose: *New Beginnings* was created in response to the following prompt given by a professor in relation to a course project.

"Your company utilizes a manufacturing facility in Ukraine that is no longer operational due to the war. Many Ukrainians have lost their livelihoods. With the spotlight currently shining on Ukraine, it has also been brought to light that the working conditions of this facility were unsafe. Workers are not receiving a fair wage and are required to work long hours to the point of passing out. How will your company continue to produce garments? How can your company help their employees during this time of need?"

This garment was created to bring awareness to the struggles of the Ukrainian people while working in the manufacturing field before the war and the loss of jobs as a result of the war ("Economy Ministry," 2022). The designer utilizes this garment to imagine a changed future for Ukraine's apparel manufacturing industry - a new beginning. While contemplating the design of this ensemble, the designer wanted to represent the lifecycle of a crop. One of Ukraine's largest crop exports is cotton ("Raw Cotton," 2021), which influenced



Figure 1: Natural dye with avocado

the designer's decision to focus the garment on the life cycle of the cotton plant. Natural dyes were exclusively used during the dyeing process for the textiles, which gives the manufacturer the opportunity to return the used dye water to the farm, where it could be used as compost and water for the fields. The natural dyeing process reduces the harmful chemicals present in the traditional dyeing process and instantly improves the working environment.

Aesthetic Properties and Visual Impact: This unisex garment includes a puffer jacket that has extended arms to limit the functionality of the consumer's hands. Restricting the use of the wearer's hands emphasizes the challenges the Ukrainian people face. The outside shell of the jacket is made from Nylon Ripstop. This synthetic fabric was chosen to symbolize the poor working conditions and the causes of poor health in the factory workers. The jacket lining and pants are made from 100% organic naturally dyed cotton with a soft hand. The natural dye comes from avocados (Figure 1), which resulted in a light pink color to symbolize love and respect the designer has for Ukraine and its citizens.

The hemline on the cropped puffer jacket, together with the waistline on the pants, creates a silhouette of a heart, which symbolizes the current social movement to protest the war and call for peace (Figure 2). The pants were also hand embroidered with an embellishment of a large sunflower, Ukraine's national flower, symbolizing pride (Figure 3).

Process, Technique, and Execution: This look was constructed using traditional flat patterning techniques and fit on a live model. The material used for the lining in the puffer jacket and the pants is 100% cotton. With the fabric being cotton, it allowed the designer to use natural dye on it. Before dyeing it, the designer prewashed the fabric to ensure it would not shrink after dyeing. The designer let the fabric soak in hot water together with a spoon full of tannin powder as a fixative (Mueller, 2021). After 5 hours the designer rinsed the fabric and put the avocado skin and pits into a large pot. Together with the fabric, the designer let the fabric soak overnight. When the fabric got removed from the pot, it got rinsed and dried in the dryer. The designer experienced that the cotton still shrank ¼ inch in the warp and grew ¼ inch in the weft after the dyeing process. When constructing the puffer jacket, the designer stuffed the jacket with repurposed filling from old pillows, and the seam allowances of the jacket were covered with bias strips to create clean finishings. All seams within the pants were serged to preserve the stretch of the fabric. The sunflower on the leg was hand embroidered using glass seed beads.



Figure 2: Shows long sleeves and silhouette between jacket and pants



Figure 3. Hand embroidery of sunflower

Originality and Innovation: New Beginnings is purposed as a wearable art piece intended to highlight the need for improvement in the workplace for industry professionals and the change needed to end the attacks on Ukraine. With this piece, the designer attempts to return the viewer's focus to the valuable resources Ukraine offers the global market and present a solution to the given prompt associated with the course

References

- Economy Ministry: At least 5 million people lost their jobs in Ukraine due to Russia's war.* (2022, November 20). The Kyiv Independent. Retrieved 04/18-2023 from <https://kyivindependent.com/economy-ministry-at-least-5-million-people-lost-their-jobs-in-ukraine-due-to-russias-war/>
- Mueller, L. (2021, May 21). *A guide to natural dyes: Make fabric dye with food and plants.* Skill Share Blog. Retrieved 03/22/2023 from <https://www.skillshare.com/en/blog/a-guide-to-natural-dyes-make-fabric-dye-with-food-and-plants/#:~:text=Salt%20and%20vinegar%20are%20both,for%20dyes%20made%20from%20plants>
- Raw Cotton.* (n.d.). OEC World. Retrieved 04/09/2023 from <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-product/raw-cotton/reporter/ukr>

