

### Tower of Resilience

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*Contextual Review:* The southern African country of Namibia houses two remarkable communities known for their unwavering resilience: the Herero people and the Angolan giraffe. Both existences were challenged to the brink of extinction by a new population of humans. As early as the 1850s, the Herero tribe came in contact and conflict with European colonists and laborers. Such conflicts came to a head in the early years of the twentieth century with mass genocide and persecution of the Herero people by German Colonists until their rule ended at the beginning of the First World War (Naughten, 2013). Despite being deprived of their lands, cattle, and social and political structures, the resilient Herero people



Figure 1. Herero dress.  
(Naughten, 2013, p. 35)

not only persevered but also astounded observers with their remarkable actions. The Herero took the power of dress by assuming the costume of the colonists, fundamentally translating the identity of European uniforms for the men and the long Victorian dress for the women (Naughten, 2013). They were their own conservationists. On the other hand, the new generation of inhabitants whose building of homes caused of loss of habitat and thus life for all giraffe species are becoming the conservationists. Namibia is the biggest success story for giraffes. The subspecies Angolan giraffe is the only giraffe species to be rated as “less concern” but the species is “vulnerable” (Giraffe, 2022). Conservation efforts of allocating land, both government and private, has improved the numbers of Angolan giraffes in Namibia to over 13,000, the largest population of giraffes in Africa. As the Herero and Angolan giraffe conservation efforts have seen success, efforts are needed to face a new threat - plastic. Namibia’s increasing human population, and thus increased plastic usage, has created more than 0.8 kilograms of mismanaged plastic waste for person per day (Jambeck et al, 2018).

*Concept:* Given the resilience of the Herero people and the Angolan giraffe, I wondered if a wearable art piece could be designed that brought their combined story, and thus the success of persistence and conservation, back into the discussion as a way to highlight the need for new conservation efforts? My answer was a modern patterned child’s dress that combined the strength of the animal and the people. The design needed to embrace the essence of resilience, the culture of the Herero people, and the presence of the new threat - plastic. I chose to adapt a traditional Victorian patchwork adult dress as a modern child’s dress. The modernity adaption is to creatively evoke the past while embracing the present and the future. Our children represent the future, and their contributions will play a vital role in conserving the life of the planet.

*Aesthetic Plan:* The design centered around the giraffe, standing tall and how its strength is combined with that of the next generation. A colorful caricature was considered the best representation for child’s wear. Using the shape of the giraffe structurally to hold the dress to the

child, necks wrapped around each other – shows strength in combined effort. This position of halter also places the giraffe center front on a two-part bodice (left and right side) the color of an African sunset. The bodice is a composite of background batik and clipped fabric scraps covered with a plastic mesh often used in vegetable and/ or fruit packages – a reference to the giraffe’s eating habits. The asymmetric (longer in the back, a modern reference to the Victorian bustle) circle skirt was chosen in a companion yellow fabric to the cream *Fairy Frost* fabric by Michael Miller base fabric of the giraffe. The color of the skirt was inspired by the cow hat worn in Figure 1. Patchwork log cabin quilt blocks made from authentic African fabrics and batiks (Figure 2.) were evenly spaced on the front of the skirt inspired by the colorful Herero dress as seen in Figure 1. Candy wrappers were used as the center of the block to keep the subject of plastic waste at the center of the discussion.



Figure 2. Log Cabin

*Process, Technique, Execution and Cohesion:* After patterning the giraffe to drape around the neck, resulting in a three-piece giraffe – two shoulder seams visible in Figure 3, the pieces were cut out and assembled, spots drawn in place. Then a layer of cotton batting was cut to shape minus the seam



Figure 3. Back side of needle

allowance of ¼ inch. Once cotton giraffe and batting were layered and pinned, the giraffe spots were needle felted with colorful wool. The “extra” wool (too high of profile) on the back was trimmed to the batting before a backing was sewn in place, curves clipped and giraffe turned right side out. The finished edge giraffe was pressed flat. Next, the assembled two-piece bodice (back and front) was layered with clipped fabric scraps covered with plastic mesh on front and batting (minus seam allowance of ¼ inch) on the back. Separately, the bodice pieces and giraffe were intricately free-motion quilted, following graceful curved lines that effectively secured the layers together. A Bernina Active 230 domestic sewing machine was used by the designer to manually quilt an overall meandering quilting pattern. After assembling the dress, eight patchwork log cabin blocks were added to the front of the skirt. The bodice was completed by hand sewing the giraffe in place – giraffe’s body on the wearer’s left side and the head on the right, allowing the two pieces to separate making room for the child’s head while donning the garment.

*Design Contribution, Originality and Innovation:* Adult fashion has been used for self-identity and for a canvas of political and social causes. In 2018, Avila used SCAR-RED to campaign the cause of heart disease in women. By using child’s wear as a platform for discussion and change, we bring the next generation into the collective mind. We take the time to explain how their actions can effect change. As a wearable art piece, this design combines identity and social art, creating a walking display of potential action. Future studies could explore child’s wear designs focused on other environmental threats such as fossil fuel usage. The items chosen for representation of the issue have the potential to be very creative and interesting. As for this design, overall, the aesthetic and execution were both charming and cohesive, highlighting the combined essence of resilience, persistence, and creativity that are so necessary in achieving success in finding solutions to the threats that challenge the planet and all life.

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