

## Community: Gratitude and Reciprocity

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### Introduction

Systemic practices of consumer culture have put the environmental and social health of all living beings at risk. A shift in the Western mindset may be possible when there is collaboration with Indigenous peoples to understand a perspective of gratitude for the earth's many gifts and to learn the wisdom of the generations before us. This design was based on research with Indigenous apparel makers that identified six core values of gratitude and reciprocity in their sustainable apparel-making practices: relationships, connection to the land, spirituality, community, sustainability, and identity and healing (Bye & Davis, 2021). The dress was co-designed with two Native American designers to tell a visual story of community. Blending Indigenous practices and history with Western perspectives was about discovering balance in personal expectations and seeking a path to more restorative practices that rebuild and support the environment. Bowers (2016) encourages looking to cultural commons as a means of sustainable wealth that supports lifestyles that are rooted in "Indigenous intergenerational knowledge of how to live within the limits and possibilities of their bioregions" (158) in balance with the money economy. The wisdom and traditions of Indigenous peoples have been challenged and ignored for centuries. Ahtone shared, "From our mother, we have received the materials from which we make our way in the world. Our cultural drive to make things is the product of the need to survive combined with the guiding stories that tell us that we should do what we do well." (Yohe & Greeves, 2019, p.37)

Community is a foundational piece of the makers' lives and an extension of the family, whatever the actual connection. Many consider it their responsibility and their honor to teach the next generation. Traditions and values are shared through gathering for ceremonies and feasts. There is a strong commitment to lift the community by supporting local businesses, promoting other's work, and honoring everyone's gifts. With giving and gratitude, the belief and practice is "the more you give, the more you get," reinforced by an understanding that the "spirits will always take care of us when we live a good life."

### Aesthetic Properties

The dress showcases a harmonious blend of cultural symbolism and contemporary design. The fabric, calico, is chosen for its humble, earthy texture, which reflects the grounding principles of the Ojibwe tribe. Introduced to Native American tribes by European trade, calico became popular for its affordability, durability, and a variety of patterns it offered. As a traditional way of decorating native skirts and dresses, they used Ribbonwork Appliqué, which involves sewing many strips of colored ribbon onto another base fabric. The aesthetic highlight of this design is the Tumbling Block ribbon weaving, resembling the Indigenous Ribbonwork Appliqué and reminding how their community is entwined together. This technique integrates a vibrant red, green, and

black pattern fixed with White. These colors are visually striking and carry deep symbolism related to the Ojibwe (Anishinaabe) tribe's values and heritage, embodying the spirit of the earth and community.

## Methods

This dress employs traditional techniques mixed with a modern fabric manipulation technique. The Tumbling Block pattern, a complex ribbon weaving process, is meticulously crafted to form a geometric harmony that catches the eye. While time-consuming, this technique underscores a commitment to preserving artisanal crafts and integrating them into wearable art. The use of calico, a simple but sturdy fabric, speaks to sustainability and practicality, aligning with indigenous values of respecting natural resources. The dress was made using a draping technique.

## Cohesion

This dress exemplifies cohesion by seamlessly integrating material, design, and cultural narrative. Each element, from the choice of fabric and colors to the weaving technique, supports the overarching theme of community and gratitude. The dress's structured yet flowing silhouette complements the intricate patterns without overpowering them, balancing modern aesthetics with traditional influences.

## Design Contribution

The design significantly contributes to the contemporary fashion dialogue by bridging Indigenous textile techniques and historical references with modern fashion elements. It challenges the fashion industry's norms by prioritizing sustainability and cultural education over transient trends. The dress serves as a garment and an educational piece that invites viewers to explore the deeper meanings of gratitude, community, and environmental consciousness embedded in Native American cultures.

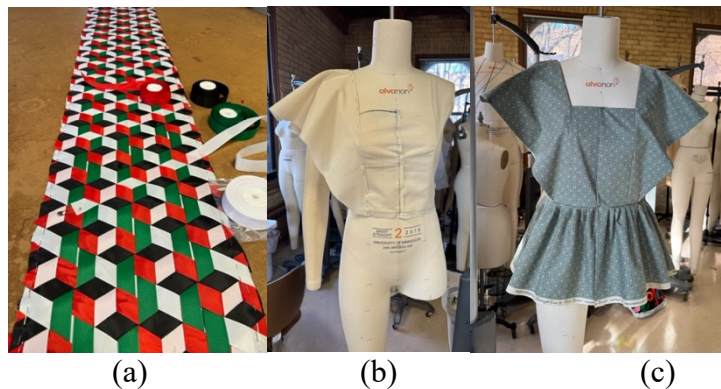


Figure 1: (a) Tumbling Block Process; (b) Draping process; (c) Making process.

**Reference:**

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