

## Fight or Flight

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As a graduate student with a background in literature and creative writing, I offer a unique perspective to designing a garment. My process includes experimentation with fabric and sketching, but to this I add the development of a concept. I relate this to writing a paper or story surrounding a central theme. Every element of the project must work within that theme, or it is not cohesively conceived.

Fight or Flight started as a conceptual exercise in body reformation and assemblage. With these ideas in my mind, I created prototypes on a half scale dress form, experimenting with Pellon until the assemblage pieces of my garment were born. The visual impact of these black pieces reminded me simultaneously of protective spikes and the weightless shapes formed by a flock of birds taking off. Instantly, the concept of fight-or-flight, a very well-known evolutionary analysis of animal behavior, became my inspiration.

At this point I did rough sketches in which I attempted to capture these two conflicting responses. When I think of the fight instinct in an animal, my first thought is of a porcupine, feeling threatened and protecting itself with barbed, poisonous quills protruding from its back. Therefore it seemed like a conceptually sound decision to place the black objects, pointy side out around, primarily, the back of the dress. To create a duality, both visually and



conceptually, I created the soft, exposed organic red silk flow on the front of the dress; something to protect.



So, the “fight” aspect of the garment was solidly in place. Now I was faced with how to create that weightless feeling I had seen in my experimentations. During this time I was also enrolled in a period patterning class for my Costume Design minor, and had just embarked on the world of undergarments in the 1880s. So I thought, why not create a hoop skirt, but one that mimics the Victorian shape of the Second Bustle Period? In leaving it open and uncovered, I created a frame over which to place my assemblage shapes. By suspending it with clear nylon monofilament, I supported the weightless feeling of the black shapes with visually weightless hoops. Then, working off of the image of a flock of birds, I brought the black pieces around to the front and the red to the back to create a swirl. Thus “flight” was born.

Finally, stepping back to view my progress, I saw a lot of organic elements that reflected nature well, but needed a grounding factor. Following the lines of my hoop skirt, I created a graduated linear grid down the back and sides of the garment. This served to ground the other elements, as well as to create depth through the layering of ordered and chaotic components. The finished result of my design process is a

garment that reflects the blending of contrasting elements of nature: delicacy and danger, order and chaos.