

## Coat of Armour

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Coat of Armour was inspired by the Muromachi Period of Japanese weapon production during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. A samurai is defined as “one who serves” (Hanel 2008: 8). Within this warrior code, the samurai exhibited ornate plates of protection that shielded the body, as well put forth “a beauty of both form and texture” (Sinclair 2004: 8). This sculpted coat design for a woman drew upon the heightened geometric lines that guarded the chest, arms, and thighs of these tactical soldiers. A 1961, wool day coat by Cristobal Balenciaga provided an intriguing study of cut, drape, and fit, when working with volume. In their exhibition of Balenciaga’s tailoring, Martin and Koda described the design, where “a wide wedge-shaped coat could become in final appearance a cinched silhouette; playing with grain and incorporating ease” (1995: 70). For Coat of Armour, the outcome was a merger of a masculine theme expressed in a feminine fit.



In contrast to the more vibrant armours, a monochromatic palette was chosen to signify metallic luster, a timeless modernity, a contoured silhouette, and depth within the fabric folds. The sole color of black on leather reflected light resulting in a gradation of tones from medium gray to midnight black. Also, rendering black in wool and leather implied a gravity and formalness comparable to the samurais “preparation for battle and the possibility of death” (Hanel 2008: 12).

The fabric manipulation was initiated by cutting and sewing strips of soft leather to medium weight wool in various panels. Loft was achieved by placing batting on the backside of the wool to create a subtle raised effect on the face. The widths of the horizontal strips of leather were engineered for visual complexity, as well to straighten at critical areas such as the lower chest and back bodice. As the rows become narrow, they define the torso, and then swell to produce volume along the skirt. The strategic placement of four large pleats below the waist enhanced the flare at the hem of the coat. Complimenting the agility and lightness of the Japanese warriors, the wool’s open placement on the coat supports joint movement at the elbow and waist.

Another aspiration of the design was the concealment of fit seams at the front and back panels achieved through the formation of pleats along the apron. This lower skirt on the coat was known as a haidate when worn by the samurais, providing “extra protection to the thighs” (Sinclair 2004: 29). The result is the continuous flow of the horizontal stripes around the circumference of the body.



“Symbolic representations of nature, such as waves and mountains, were seen as powerful inspirations to the samurai to act with equal majesty and grace” (Sinclair 2004: 32). This idea is embodied through the placement of the detachable leather cape at the shoulders. Magnets allow the swift removal of the layer that protects from atmospheric elements. Equally, a coated zipper was utilized at the coat front to repel wind and water.

In conclusion, Coat of Armour was designed to provide comfort and protection. The richness of fabrics including leather and wool elevated the coat, similar to the rise of the samurai warriors to “aristocratic class” (Hanel 2008: 8). A contoured back section demonstrated drama as it streamed from below the cape. Engineered panels, fit, shape, and proportion aided in the transformation of defensive attire for battle into modern feminine architecture.

#### References

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