

Master and Commander

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Keywords: Design, queer, alternative



This design is a queer reading of the past, a combination of Victorian styling, military aggression and lurid fetish alter the lens through which we view history. The military, lauded as a beachhead of heteronormative values, is instead reexamined hybridized with the Victorian period and its strange contrast of decadence and propriety. So often in history the queer experience and that of women is erased in favor of narratives told by populations in power. In opposition, this piece rewrites the past to position women and queerness at the center of this alternative history.

Both masculine and feminine shapes are combined in hourglass silhouette contrasted with sharp military styling and tight fit. In opposition to the vision of women as weak and prone to diaphanous softness, the hard, definite lines of strap seams create a form of strength and distinction that defies traditional values. Corseting, which has been long associated with the harsh bonds of oppression and forced feminine propriety is actually integrated into the pants and helps to form the striking silhouette. In this the corset is utilized to bend the body to the wearers will, queering form to emphasize its function as an elegant armor. These are the clothes of a woman decked out for war with all the pageantry implicit in the military's polish and ceremony made explicit to the viewer.

Indulgence was the theme of color and texture. I wanted to create a visceral feast of contrast. No period quite exemplified excess in the way Baroque did, and its extravagant patterns influenced the choice in lavish textiles featured in the collection. Heavy jacquard woven fabric and cotton canvas color blocking combine the decadence with utilitarianism. It was from these thematically fitting textiles that the color palette was developed and combined with the sharp black that is so iconic in the labeling of sexualities deemed deviant.

This design was crafted through a combination of flat pattern work and numerous fittings. The patterns were drafted at the model's basic measurements and a sample was created using similar weight fabrics. Though the hidden-button blouse only needed minor changes, the underbust pants required several fit sessions to perfect in shape. Because I wanted to craft a very dramatic hourglass silhouette the pants were made essentially into a corset and include eight spiral steel bones and a laced back with privacy panel.

One of the other major challenges of the design was working with the heavy jacquard that was a feature of the piece and base for the color palette. The large scale pattern repeat required very careful marker making to be lined up so that the curves in pattern worked to actively highlight the model's form. Strapped seams in sharp black helped to add support to the garment and outline the body further. The stripes across the abdomen were appliquéd on along with non-functional buttons and they served to call attention to the cinched waist.

The suspenders were crafted from leather and chrome hardware, along with helping further support the garment, they also relate back to the harnesses of common fetish wear. The other accessory included with the garment is the cravat which is made from a silk/linen blend with cathedral lace trim. Utilizing a natural fiber mix was very necessary as its body was created through a pleating technique adapted by Diane Sparks and documented in "Explorations in Pleated Fabric Garment Structures" (2004) that mimics the famous pleats of Fortuny. This technique involved rolling the fabric around a large pipe, wrapping it in fishing line, compressing it, then wetting the material and letting it dry. The result was firm, crisp pleats that were arranged in three tiers and attached to the collar of the accessory.

Though flat pattern was the primary technique used to develop the initial garment, draping, fitting, and textile treatments were all required to bring the garment to its ultimate fruition.

#### References

Sparks, D. (2004). Explorations in pleated fabric garment structures. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 22(1/2), 38-43.