

TRIBE: Translating Tribal Tattooing into Textiles

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TRIBE was inspired by the geometric shapes and bold contrast of the tattoos of Oceanic tribes, such as the Yap and Mogmog, as recorded by tattoo anthropologist, Lars Krutak. In his article, *The Art of Nature: Tattoo History of Western Oceania* (Krutak, 2011), Krutak not only shows illustrations of the tattoo designs, but provides detailed explanations of the meaning behind each tattoo and the techniques used to achieve them. The idea that the process and meaning behind the tattoo was as important as the finished tattoo itself helped me to create my own tattoo symbology and textile bonding technique, in order to add depth to the finished garment



The unique surface design was developed by paring down traditional body modification patterns to their geometric foundations and transforming them into a unique, modern symbology. The tattoos of the Yap chieftains were the main reference for the piece. The bold and highly contrasted shapes were rendered through a variety of techniques, including laser cutting. The initial shape of the jacket was patterned first, in order to create a canvas for the tattoo design. The pattern pieces were then digitized and printed out and different tattoo configurations were hand-drawn on each pattern piece. Once the desired configuration was achieved, the pattern and tattoo designs were recreated using Adobe Illustrator and prepared for laser cutting. The wool and leather were then cut separately and bonded together using a heat-bonded interfacing.

Wool and leather were the main materials used in the creation of this piece. Wool was chosen because it is a traditional textile for outerwear. Leather was chosen as the insert material because it is both a traditional outerwear material and directly referenced the inspiration, which was a design on skin. The colors of the materials, black and white, were chosen for two reasons. The first is that black and white naturally contrast, like the ink of a tattoo contrasts on skin. The second reason for these color choices was that the



matte black leather closely resembles the finished color of the black ink traditionally used in tribal tattooing.

This surface was created by first laser cutting patterns out of wool and leather. The leather pieces were then inserted into the wool and an iron-on interfacing was used to bond the materials together, effectively creating a new, bonded textile. Once the pattern is established, the design is simple to replicate and could be recreated on many different garments using a variety of textiles. This cutting and bonding technique not only allows the designer to create interesting prints using different materials, but also gives the designer the chance to play with relief by pairing materials of varying thicknesses together, adding to the visual interest of the garment. This piece was completed in March of 2014.

Reference:

Krutak, L. (2011). *The art of nature: Tattoo history of western oceania*. Retrieved from <http://larskrutak.com/the-art-of-nature-tattoo-history-of-western-oceania/>