

Amma's Chaos and Order

Tameka N. Ellington, Kent State University, USA

Keywords: Couture techniques, Functional clothing, textile innovation

Measurements: Bust: 40" Waist: 40" Hip: 38"

Throughout history many well-known artists have used well-known literature and stories as inspiration for their work such as Ford Maddox Brow's painting depicting William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet or Salvador Dali's "Mad Tea Party" inspired by Lewis Carroll's Alice and Wonderland (Temple, 2011). From a fashion perspective, Armani, Balmain and many other designers have used cultural/ethnic inspiration to express their design creativity. As a designer and researcher, I am on a journey to discover how my imagination and creative skills can interpret African fables and folklore as a platform to learn more about the variety of cultures and tribes inhabiting our second largest continent.

Amma's Chaos & Order is a way to tell a brief story pertaining to the religion/culture of the Dogon people from the Republic of Mali. Research suggested that the story line of the Dogon Creation is hard to summarize as it "lacks any ongoing storyline" (van Beek, et, al., 1991, p. 140). The story is also slightly different from author to author. According to the most common story, Amma, the supreme God is the origin of all mankind and he lived among the celestial skies. Amma created the world by splitting itself into two sections: Ogo embodying chaos/disorder and Nommo embodying order and creation.

As discussed in the creation myth, the first people were androgynous, both male and female. Therefore, a simple non-gender specific silhouette was chosen. The Dogon tribal grab is a plethora of colors ranging from magenta to teal, thus *Amma's Chaos & Order* is reminiscent of this array of colors. The Dogon people are said to be descendants of Ancient Egyptians and have keen knowledge of astronomy and specifically the brightest star in the heavens, Sirius. The Dogon knowledge of Sirius and the overall galaxy is mysteriously complex as scientists did not actually see the star until 1862 and the star was not photographed until 1970 (Biblioteca Pleyades, n.d.), however; the Dogon have known of and been connected to Sirius for thousands of years. It is said that the Dogon were taught the mystery of Sirius by the Nommos, who were its extraterrestrial inhabitants (Biblioteca Pleyades, n.d.). Therefore, the body of Amma was represented with a bold digital print of the Seagull nebula and Sirius on rayon challis. Silver embroidered French knots were used to add texture on some stars, giving further representation of the galaxy and to exemplify the spender of Sirius.

Ogo-chaos was created mostly from bias-cut strips of shabori-dyed rayon challis. These strips were dyed in a variety of colors reminiscent of the raffia strips used in the costumes of the Dogon dama dancers. Hand-knitted pieces were created to add texture and interest to the surface. Buttons were used as well for texture and interest. All of these elements were hand stitched to the base fabric, which was also shabori-dyed. The variety of media in this surface design created a very tactile interpretation of chaos.

As the story goes, Nommo had close connections with the Egyptian gods, specifically Isis the goddess of the sky. The Nommo-order of this exhibition piece was created in a navy batik hieroglyphics pattern which was sewn with crisp vertical pleats. The pattern was first developed as a laser cut template on Adobe Illustrator. The template was used to mark the design onto the fabric and then the hieroglyphics were created by hand-painting batik wax onto the rayon challis. In perfect contrast yet remaining harmonious together, I further display the separation of Ogo and Nommo, the silhouette of the garment was created with separating zippers down the front and back in order to split the two as Amma did during the creation. Then the zippers can be used to bring the two together as Amma requested in the end.

Not much is known about the mysterious astronomical knowledge that the Dogon have of the celestial bodies, thus it was necessary to retell this tribe's story through creative research. *Amma's Chaos and Order* is an important work which introduces us to or advances our understanding of the Dogon culture. These people are a significant part of human knowledge of astronomy as we know it today. The results of the conceptualization of the piece shows that the complexity of design can be achieved with strategic planning of the parts. This work contributes to the field new knowledge of the Dogon culture and their mysterious understanding of Sirius as well as how to use tactile media to retell a story.

Biblioteca Pleyades. (n.d.). *Dogon Creational Myths*. Retrieved from

http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/mitos_creacion/esp_mitoscreacion_1.htm

Gateway Africa. (n.d.). *Dogon Creation Myth*. Retrieved from [http://www.gateway-](http://www.gateway-africa.com/stories/Dogon_Creation_Myth.html)

[africa.com/stories/Dogon_Creation_Myth.html](http://www.gateway-africa.com/stories/Dogon_Creation_Myth.html)

Temple, E. (2011, December 29). Great Works of Art Inspired by Great Works of Literature Retrieved from <http://flavorwire.com/245401/great-works-of-art-inspired-by-great-works-of-literature/11>

van Beek, W. E. A., Bedaux, R. M. A., Blier, S. P., Bouju, J., Crawford, P. I., Douglas, M., Lane, P., and Meillassoux, C. (1991). Dogon Restudied: A Field Evaluation of the Work of Marcel Griaule. *Current Anthropology*, 32(2), 139-167.

