



Dancing Seafoam, a Tribute to the Oregon Coast

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Couture Techniques, Textile Innovation, Sustainability

Bust 38, Waist 30, Hips 42, Length 60

When high winds and tides agitate debris, decaying organic matter, salts, and other flotsam and jetsam floating along the surface of the ocean, pockets of air form and rise to the surface of the water. With enough agitation these pockets of air come together and form a thick yet buoyant foam that can pile several meters high along the shore ("What is Sea Foam?," 2013). The colors of this foam are usually a pale beige or white if spawned from organic materials, but foams can be tinted a brown or red color if formed from waters containing human pollutants such as spilled oil and factory runoff ("What is Sea Foam?," 2013). This foam is often a nuisance to beach goers as it can make navigating the shore difficult, and, depending on the nature of the organic matter that led to its formation, emit a foul odor. With its foul smell and composition frequently consisting of decaying sea life, the foam is not something inherently beautiful. I witnessed an occurrence of the foam during a trip to the Oregon Coast among high wind warnings and frequent downpours. Despite the smell and the blustery wind, the sight of the foam swirling and lifting high into the air above my head was mesmerizing. The foam appeared lofty while in flight, but its movement in the waves had visual weight and the foam had soft undulating bumps along the surface. It was a unique natural texture that I had never seen before.

My design scholarship is rooted in the translation of natural movement, texture and phenomena into original surface and textile design. My previous work has been influenced by the flow and texture of lava, the concentric design of tree rings, the color work and movement of butterfly wings, and patterns of feathers on birds. After living in Oregon for four years and witnessing the natural beauty of the Oregon coast from the cliffs of the Coastal Range to the miles of beaches covered in driftwood and oyster shells, my current scholarship is aimed at developing new surface design techniques to represent the naturally occurring phenomena along the Oregon Coast.

Dancing Seafoam is the first in a series of garments that will be dedicated to the natural elements found along the Oregon coastline. By focusing on translating the natural elements of the coast into wearable art I hope to raise awareness of social responsibility to the environment. My specific focus for this series is to look at parts of nature that are not considered traditionally beautiful but are still important to protect. While it is not pleasant to smell and can be a nuisance to humans, the foam carries in organic matter that helps feed creatures along the shoreline.

The design process of the garment started with exploring previous designers' endeavors into representing coastal phenomena and embellishment techniques. The most compelling garment based

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on coastal phenomena is Alexander McQueen's "Oyster Dress," a garment from his *Irere* collection meant to evoke a shipwrecked maiden stepping out of the sea (Bolton, Sundsbø, Blanks, & Frankel, 2011). The dress is embellished with hundreds of rows of silk flounces, with long flowing strands hanging from the shoulders. For me, the "Oyster Dress" was used as a jumping off point in the direction of creating a garment that had compelling movement and gritty and natural appearance. When worn the dress seemed to swallow up the wearer. I wanted to design a dress that was overwhelming, yet had a lofty appearance and moved like the foam I witnessed that day.

I began the construction process by testing various ways to achieve the look of floating and bouncing pieces of seafoam. Initial design concepts involved the installation of interior fans into the garment that when turned on would surround the wearer with pieces of the artificial foam. This proved to be a more complicated engineering feat than my budget could reproduce, and so the design morphed into something that was self-contained and would float when the wearer walked or was exposed to a breeze. I tried several methods of recreating the bumpy foam texture of the garment, including using starched fabric formed over molds and layers of tulle. I finally settled on hand tucked puffs formed over a layer of loose stuffing.

The base of the garment was created using draping and flat patterning techniques and is constructed out of 72" wide felt. Felt was chosen for its stable hand and wide width. The felt provided an anchor for the hand sewn puffs that would not crumple under the weight of the dress. The over layer of the garment is made of ivory polyester organza hand sewn into variously sized puffs. The organza gave a slightly shiny "wet" appearance and allowed some of the texture of the batting to show through. The inside of each anchored puff is beaded with sequins, wooden beads, or shells to represent the mixture of sand, debris, and organic material mixed into the foam when it washes up on shore. The puffs start at the bottom larger in size and gradually become smaller and closer together towards the top of the dress to balance off the large size of the garment.

The garment also features loose hanging puffs of organza attached with clear fishing line throughout the dress. These loose pieces sway and float around the dress when it is in movement or in a windy environment. These hanging pieces mimic the swirling and floating movement of the foam I witnessed on the Oregon Coast that day. When the garment is in motion the flare of the skirt mimics the natural movement of the foam floating atop the waves as they crash into shore.

Bolton, A., Sundsbø, S., Blanks, T., & Frankel, S. (2011). *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* (First Edition, Later Printing edition). New York : New Haven, Conn: Metropolitan Museum of Art.

What is Sea Foam? (2013). Retrieved May 26, 2016, from <http://www.innovateus.net/science/what-sea-foam>

