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Fallschirm

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Fallschirm

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in Fashion Design with Honors

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APPROVED

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-Abstract-

The final year in the life of a fashion design major at Syracuse University is a test of everything they have learned in their time here. Each member of the program knows this challenge lies ahead, and prepares for it. But in 2007-2008, the program made a large change that threw a curveball at the senior class. The seniors were presented with three different assignments to complete.

Having been given multiple sets of criteria to stimulate our thought processes, coming up with something concrete that I was going to be able to work with seemed an easy task. Indeed the first two projects went well, and the results were quite pleasing to me and my colleagues. This creativity did not last all the way through the year and the third collection proved to be the biggest trial of the three.

The third set of criteria which was to inspire a collection was an interesting one. Hashing together bits and pieces of Ralph Lauren, a fashion designer with 40 years under his belt, and Edie Biel, the late eccentric socialite with a very eclectic fashion sense may seem like a reach, but upon further research they weren't quite as far apart as they initially seemed. Each person re-interpreted 1940's fashion in their own unique way. Even with all this stimulation, designing two complete collections had taken it's toll and the third did not seem to be going anywhere.

After finally establishing what direction this collection was going, it was time to narrow my research. A particularly inspirational piece was a pair of shoes with a stacked glass heel fashioned from the windshield of an inactive airplane. This prime example of 'make do and mend' brought together the whole concept of the collection.

While military themed collections are as old as fashion design itself, there are infinite ways to interpret this look. One of the most prominent parts of a military inspired collection is the colors. Military costumes are also easily identified by their incredibly tailored structure, and their substantial lapel styling. Medals and buttons decorate many military dress uniforms, and I took this as inspiration as well. The challenge then became to create a military and vintage inspired collection without making the audience feel like it was seeing the same old tired military and old Hollywood clichés which walk down so many runways each year.

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-Acknowledgements-

I would like to take a brief moment to thank all the people who made this entire thesis project possible:

My capstone advisor, Professor Jeffery Mayer whose constant input and support have been invaluable to me over the past four years both in fashion and in honors,

My thesis reader, Professor Karen Bakke who really helped me get started with putting pen to paper on my creative process,

The honors department, especially Carolyn Ostrander who gave me so much help planning my progress through the honors program from my very first semester,

My outside editor, David Hopkins, who has read my thesis almost as much as I have,

And finally my family, both Stuff's and Mehls' who range from being my inspiration and foundation to my materials source and proof-readers I am who I am because of all of you.

There are really no words enough to thank all of you for what you have done for me so a simple 'Thank You' will have to suffice.

- Reflective Essay "Fallschirm" -

The fourth and final year in the life of a fashion design major at Syracuse University is much different than that of any other student in attendance. Their last year is not filled with papers and exams, but with drawing and sewing. It is the chance for them to demonstrate what the last four years and \$160,000 has gone toward, but more importantly to express through their much beloved medium their creativity and viewpoint. Each of us in our 28 person class knew from our first year at Syracuse that they would have the opportunity to craft a six piece collection based solely on their ideas and skills. In 2007- 2008, the program made a large change that threw a curveball at the senior class. We were presented with three different creative outlines to make into completed concepts and outstanding collections.

These assignments called every aspect of our college career into question. Why fashion? How do you express who you are and your particular viewpoint through this media? Highlighting your strengths, and camouflaging any weaknesses, while clearly conveying your thought process to a group of people who may not have any reference point for this medium is quite the challenge. Having been given multiple sets of criteria to stimulate our thought

processes, coming up with something concrete that I was going to be able to work with for six months seemed an easy task. Indeed the first two projects went well, and the results were quite pleasing both to myself and my colleagues. Unfortunately this creativity did not last all the way through the fall semester. The third collection proved to be the biggest trial of the three.

The third set of criteria which was to inspire a collection was an interesting one. Hashing together bits and pieces of Ralph Lauren, a fashion designer with 40 years under his belt, and Edie Biel, the late eccentric socialite with a fantastic, albeit shocking fashion sense, may seem like a reach. But, upon further research they weren't quite as far apart as they initially seemed. Both incorporate(d) elements of classic 1940's fashion in their own unique way. Even though this is one of my, and many other designers, favorite periods in fashion, after designing two complete collections my creativity seemed to dry up. The turning point was something that I can only describe as a moment of serendipity. Sitting in my living room, surrounded by WWII era books and images, and voicing my apparent inability to be creative to my housemate, she appeared to be lost in a world of her own. After a few minutes of silence she said, 'If a plane crashed in the backyard what would

you do?' I jokingly replied 'make clothes out of the pieces'. And a collection was born.

After finally establishing in what direction this collection was going, it was time to narrow my research. In the wonderful ES Bird library I found a book called 'Nazi Chic, Fashioning the Women of the Third Reich', which depicted the garments designed for, and made by Nazi affiliated women before and during the war. A particularly inspirational piece was a pair of shoes with a stacked glass heel fashioned from the windshield of an inactive airplane. This prime example of 'make do and mend' brought together the whole concept of the collection.

Having close family ties to WWII was very helpful. I was able to speak to my grandparents about their experiences, as well as tap them for vintage materials. Certain aspects of the collection allowed me to really incorporate items that have been collected for years and years. The majority of the buttons used in the garments are from the vast collection of both my grandmothers, my mother, and family friends. Many of them come from the era that so inspired me. My aunt and uncle gave me sources to shop for upholstery fabric, and these fabrics would give me a different

feel than traditional garment weight fabrics. Also in my possession was a parachute I purchased a few years ago with knowledge that I would certainly need it for something someday! All these elements added to the ideas already floating in my head of vintage and modern silhouettes and helped the sketches to flow from my pencil.

The presentation of this collection was very important. I took a vintage book and whitewashed a number of the pages. All 25 of my finalized drawings I transferred onto very sheer parchment paper. These drawings I then mounted individually onto the whitewashed pages. Together these elements created a modified book. This technique was something that one would have had to do in wartime, as the availability of art materials was very limited. Each drawing is contrasted by an image from World War II on the opposite page. These images, my inspiration for the collection itself, I distressed with tea dying as well as singed edges to give them an aged appearance. Each image was then overlaid with the same sheer parchment the drawings were done on to add to the continuity of the book as a whole. When finished, I presented the book in a Ziploc bag with latex gloves. This was to give the impression that the book was an artifact, found recently, and containing the drawings of someone from the WWII era. The

drawings and the structured nature of book itself show how inspired I was by 1940's elegance as well as military themes.

Making a military and vintage inspired collection is something that happens every season in the fashion world. But making a collection without making the audience feel like it was seeing the same old military and vintage Hollywood clichés is something unique. Keeping in mind that many designers make use of military references, a good part of my research was making sure not to echo the designs of others.

As recently as the season when I was creating my designs, giants of the fashion industry were making waves with their unique, military inspired, collections. John Galliano is a particular fan of military influence and it has been seen over and over again in his collections. For spring/ summer 2008, the space for his show was decorated with parachutes and barbed wire, two elements which I incorporated into my clothing to much different effect. Ralph Laruen, one of the influences of the collection initially, historically has a nautical and somewhat militaristic theme. Both these designers, and countless others, take military elements such as colors or hardware and incorporate them directly into garments. It

was important to me to differentiate myself from them, as well as from an overwhelming military theme by changing and tweaking elements in order to make them my own.

Military costumes are easily identified by their incredibly tailored structure, and their substantial lapel styling. Medals and buttons decorate many military dress uniforms, and I took all these classic elements as inspiration. Here it was important to me not to be too literal. I moved larger than military regulation metal buttons (which would be found center-front on military jackets) to the side of tightly fitted pants. Traditional wide jacket button hole styling was something I was very interested in keeping as it brought through my contrasting accent colors in the button holes themselves.

It would have been very meaningful, both for my family and myself, to use some of the medals which my ancestors gained in war, but using them would have been a fine line to tread. There was also an element of concern for their well being. Having one plop off onto the runway would not be good for anyone involved. Something as powerful as a war veteran's medal must be treated with a great deal of respect, and as such showcased. An honest fear of not showing enough respect for the honor these badges

command, or somehow disrespecting those who had earned them was paramount. I never wanted to pin them in the usual neat rows, but thought placing them anywhere else would be almost blasphemous in a way. In the end, my concern for the medals outweighed my interest in using them, and they remained in Buffalo NY with my grandparents.

While military themed collections are as old as fashion design itself, there are infinite ways to interpret this look. One of the most prominent parts of a military inspired collection is the colors. Classic colors include navy blue, kaki, army green, dress white, and the grays of battle ships. In my collection I decided to take the traditional color pallet and give it a modern update, including some of my favorite color combinations. With every outfit in the collection being monochromatic, there are only six colors in the collection. The classic navy I took to a different level by choosing a bright hue of royal blue. "Army Green" I replaced with bright chartreuse, and kaki with chocolate and camel. Finally incorporating the dress whites of the Navy came to the collection both in ecru and gray shades. These core colors carry from the clothes through to makeup and accessories.

While each outfit was to be monochromatic, I worried that such a look could quickly become boring. Each outfit, by design, is made up of many panels. Each panel is topstitched ¹ with a color which contrasts the main body of the garment. The color of the thread detailing on any given garment is the color of another outfit. This detailing has three main purposes, the first of which is to show off my tailoring skills. More importantly the topstitching ties together the garments which would otherwise have no colors in common. Finally it adds visual interest to each garment giving it a unique flair which would differentiate the line from others on the market.

Part of selling a line, whether it be to a future boss, a buyer, an audience or your customer, is having a story which drives the line. And as with any story, I had to have a title. I believe it was the same roommate who suggested titling it something mildly rude “but in a different language, so it won’t sound as bad”. After considering the ‘essence’ of my collection, I settled on Fallschirm which means ‘parachute’ in German, and decidedly not controversial. This title stemmed from German military wives during WWII, which were a group I seriously researched. Parachutes

¹ Topstitch: To sew a row of stitching close to the seam or edge of (a garment) on the outer side of the fabric

themselves are essential part of my collection, as well as an important element in my story. Which is as follows:

A group of young ladies are living on a farm in Germany in the late 1930's.

One afternoon a British RAF fighter jet crashes in their backyard. The pilot and gunman parachute to safety in the fields behind the house.

After befriending the injured airmen, and hiding them from German forces, they put together a fashion line consisting of outfits made from anything and everything available....

This story really helped me stay on track while creating my collection. Keeping in mind aspects of clothing from the area, both civilian and military, allowed patternmaking and sewing to happen more organically. There was no need to labor over minute decisions when there is so much history to reference and reinterpret. By looking at historic costumes that had an affect on my designs, it became more of an issue of modifying the ideas to fit modern tastes and my personal style. In creating a story, you are also creating a customer. This fictional person, a woman in this case, is an important element for any designer. Looking at all the pieces you are creating, you must ask yourself the question "would the same person wear everything?" If the answer is no, modification must occur. If one client would not like every element, the items are not clearly united as a collection.

The garments in my collection are meant to cloth a woman through any occasion in her life. This in mind, another aspect of traditional design that affected me was the idea that a fashion show is to close with a bridal gown. This idea has long gone by the wayside but it is something that has always captivated me. Both these things in mind, a six piece collection fitting any occasion from work to wedding emerged.

The first piece I made was a camel cotton wide lapel jacket with raised cocoa pinstripe, royal blue topstitching and lace-through brown vintage cotton velvet with hidden hook & eye closure and royal blue topstitching. This outfit is paired with cast bronze aviator pendant and reconstructed pearl and chain necklace with fabricated chain and closure. As this jacket has a good amount of visual impact I chose it to go first in the runway show. While it is an eye-catching outfit, it was also important to not have my most exciting piece go down the runway first. Each model and her outfit must build upon the last until the big finale piece.

When shown on the runway, this first piece will be followed by a similarly neutrally colored outfit. A light gray puff-sleeve jacket of vintage cotton/ rayon upholstery fabric with floral twill weave and

brown top-stitching closes with a lace-through faux suede belt. This top is paired with dove-gray faux suede straight leg pants with side hook and eye closure and vintage button leg detailing. These buttons are of a scale similar to buttons on the front of vintage military jackets. To bring it all together this outfit is accessorized with a necklace of cast bronze aviator pendant with reconstructed vintage pearl and metal bead chain. I modified small parachute, which would have been used as an auxiliary chute on the back of a larger parachute, in order to turn it into a fashion accessory.

Next a chartreuse cotton sateen fabric with a brown flocked pattern constitutes a re-invented trench coat. The pattern is accented by brown hand topstitching, and the single-sleeved jacket closes with brown vintage cotton velvet belt. The belt was given a touch of detail with chartreuse topstitching and hook & eye closure. The colors of this outfit give a contrast to the previous two outfits coloring, while remaining tied to the collection through the shape of the collar and skirt. Again, it was important to bring in aspects of my military inspiration, and in this particular outfit a brown aviator helmet style hat made from the same cloth as the belt literally caps off the look.

Keeping with bringing in the updated military colors, a ribbed royal blue cotton/ rayon blend hooded jacket is fourth in the runway order. With front pocket detail, hood and back zipper entry this jacket takes a step toward modernity while still clearly being influenced by bygone eras of fashion. The jacket overlaps a distressed pair of royal blue duck cloth high- waisted pants. The pants have gray topstitching, a fitted leg and hook & eye closure which differentiates them both from classic military pants and current trends.

One of the more retro styled pieces is a chartreuse silk dupion day dress with a boat neck. Hand painted vintage seersucker buttons and white hand embroidery help the chartreuse really pop. What makes this dress different from garments that would have been made in the 1930's is its asymmetric styling. The left side of the dress lies close to the body while the right side flares from the waist. Each panel of the right side has a great amount of added fullness which falls gently over a shredded satin petticoat with contrasting chartreuse topstitching. The petticoat not only helps to support the structure of the dress it lays beneath, but adds a certain amount of cheekiness to the look as a whole. The accessories for this outfit include a hat made from the same chartreuse silk as the dress, and

a medium sized parachute which was originally intended to ease the decent of large-scale model rockets. I modified the cords to make a harness which would be easily put onto and removed from the model, which would also not take away from the lines of the dress.

The final piece in the show, true to what I always imagined is, in essence, a bridal piece. A fine gauge knit cotton Lycra knit boat neck top with hand embroidered chartreuse detailing overlaps the dramatic skirt. Multiple layers of color gradated silks and cottons range from ecru at the bottom to pure white at the top. Though basically a sheath skirt, a bit of flare in the back eases movement and gives the outfit drama. Variegated chartreuse topstitching on each individual ruffle gives an otherwise white skirt more depth and dimension. As the big finale piece it is accessorized with a 26 foot wide vintage WWII parachute. I braided original cording into a modern harness which accentuates the neckline of the top and turns it from survival tool to accessory.

In addition to making the clothing for my collection, I assigned myself the extra task of creating jewelry that would complement the line. This was also an element that, I felt, would set

me apart from the other designers. Customized jewelry which would coordinate to each outfit was much more appealing to me than scouring stores for accessories that might not work at all with my designs. Having enrolled in a casting class, it seemed like the perfect opportunity to join together two media which I have always enjoyed and expressed my creativity through.

I cast plastic parachute figurines in bronze and gave them different patinas to make them look older, as well as bringing in a little more of my color palette. For the chains I mixed together vintage strands of pearls, pieces of chain and miniature barbed wire which I made from nickel. The closures were either salvaged from the vintage pearls or I fabricated them. Each of these elements was carefully thought over. A simple string of pearls is an iconic piece of jewelry worn for centuries by refined women. To mix this icon with rougher elements such as the grittier looking chains and miniature barbed wire really harkens back to the original idea of combining old and new, as well as working with things you have.

This collection is really about the balance between very feminine 1930's and 1940's women, and the rugged nature of a stranded aviator. This balance is shown especially in these

ornaments as they are a concise version of what I hoped the outfits would convey. Every necklace is unique in many aspects, but carries through as a collection with the incorporation of similar elements. Each piece of was designed with an outfit in mind, and will be paired accordingly. But from head to toe each outfit must be thought of as an entire look, and the makeup really expresses that for me.

My drawings for this collection incorporated figures with vaguely expressed faces. An eyebrow, nostril and hint of lip were all I used to delineate their expressions. This concentration on the lip really inspired my makeup. After deciding to concentrate on the lip and looking at many images of 1940's makeup, the idea of doing classic with a twist seemed the perfect way to carry through the ideas from my collection into my makeup. My original concept was to have each model with a very basic face. Simple clean makeup would hearken to military restraint, but a touch of 1940's glamour was necessary, and can be seen clearly in the dramatic false eyelashes. A modern pop was to be added by bringing in the contrasting color, which had been topstitched onto each garment, in the model's lips. After consulting a makeup artist on campus, she recommended a company which was manufacturing lipsticks in

exactly the colors I was using. She and I worked together to take these pigments and match them to my garments in a way which would draw attention to the detail work in every garment. From makeup to shoes the little details are something that were quite important to me in creating and presenting my collection.

Other accessories for the collection include vintage shoes. My objective was to present each outfit with a single color from the color pallet. Finding shoes to coordinate was looking to be next to impossible until my family again came through. Five of the six pairs are vintage pieces from my own, or my mother's collection. Two of them are actually from the 1940's which adds a real flair of the period to the collection as a whole. The newest pair of shoes was chosen because of the bright blue color, and silver hardware but still hold the overall 1940's feel.

How does a collection transition from its inception? For me it was with my grandparents. My grandmothers were powerful women in their own right, and their memories were literally passed on to me in the materials used to build this collection. Every experience I have ever been through had a way of becoming part of these clothes. Having strong ties to my family lead me to think

about where they were at my age. For my grandfathers, this meant at war. For my grandmothers, it meant waiting for them to come home. But the war, of course, was not something that was far away. They truly had to deal with the idea of 'make do and mend'. Perhaps it was these experiences that lead them to save anything that might be of use. Perhaps it was their stories and other stories from that time period that led me to purchase a parachute years ago. A fascination with the 1930's and 40's, a great deal of respect for my family before me, and an undying love of design have lead me to where I am today; finished with my first fashion collection and trying to grasp words enough to describe the creative process that lead me here.

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-Summary-

Three years of training in every aspect of fashion design cumulates in the fourth and final year of school for fashion majors at Syracuse University. It is the chance for seniors to demonstrate what the last four years has gone toward, but more importantly to express their creativity and viewpoint to their friends, family and the industry as a whole. For years the program at Syracuse has followed this pattern, but in 2007, the program threw a curveball at the senior class. We were presented with three different assignments to complete instead of the traditional singular collection.

These assignments called every aspect of your college career into question. Why fashion? How do express who you are and your particular viewpoint through this media? Highlighting your strengths, and camouflaging any weaknesses while clearly conveying your thought process to a group of people who may not have any reference point for this medium is quite the challenge. Having been given three sets of criteria to stimulate our thought processes, coming up with concrete collections seemed an easy task. Indeed the first two projects went easily, and the results were quite pleasing to myself and my colleagues. This creativity did not last as long as it

needed to, and the third collection proved to be the biggest trial of the three.

The third set of criteria which was to inspire a collection was an interesting one. Ralph Lauren, a fashion designer with 40 years under his belt, and Edie Biel, the late eccentric socialite with shocking fashion sense, are pretty disparate research topics. Upon further research they weren't quite as far apart as they initially seemed. Both use elements of classic 1940's fashion in their own unique way. The 1940's is one of my, and many other designers, favorite periods in fashion, but after designing two complete collections my creativity still seemed to dry up. The turning point was something that I can only describe as a moment of serendipity. Sitting in my living room, surrounded by WWII era books and images, and voicing my apparent inability to be creative to my housemate, she appeared to be lost in a world of her own. After a few minutes of silence she said, 'If a plane crashed in the backyard what would you do?' I jokingly replied 'make cloths out of the pieces'. And a collection was born.

After finally establishing what direction this collection was going, it was time to narrow my research. In ES Bird library I found a

book called 'Nazi Chic, Fashioning the Women of the Third Reich', which depicted the garments designed for, and made by Nazi affiliated women before and during the war. A particularly inspirational piece was a pair of shoes with a stacked glass heel fashioned from the windshield of an inactive airplane. This prime example of 'make do and mend' brought together the whole concept of the collection.

Having family who lived through and experienced WWII was very helpful. I was able to speak to my grandparents about their experiences, as well as tap them for vintage materials. Certain aspects of the collection allowed me to incorporate items that have been collected for years and years. The majority of the buttons used in the garments are from the vast collection both of my grandmothers, my mother, and family friends. Many of them come from the era that so inspired me. My aunt and uncle gave me sources to shop for upholstery fabric, and these fabrics would give me a different feel than traditional garment weight fabrics. Also in my possession was a parachute I purchased a few years ago with knowledge that I would certainly need it for something someday! All these elements added to the ideas I already had of

vintage and modern silhouettes which helped the sketches to flow from my pencil

Military collections are constantly occurring all over the fashion world. John Galliano is a particular fan of military influence. For spring/ summer 2008, the space for his show was decorated with parachutes and barbed wire, two elements which I incorporated into my clothing to much different effect. Ralph Laruen, one of the influences of the collection initially, historically has a nautical and somewhat militaristic theme. Both these designers, and countless others, take military elements such as colors or hardware and incorporate them directly into garments. It was important to me to differentiate myself from them, as well as from an overwhelming military theme by changing and tweaking elements in order to make them my own.

One of the most prominent parts of a military inspired collection is the colors. Classic colors include navy blue, kaki, army green, dress white, and the grays of battle ships. In my collection I decided to take the traditional color pallet and give it a modern update, including some of my favorite color combinations. Military costumes are also easily identified by their incredibly tailored

structure, and well defined collars. Medals and buttons decorate many military dress uniforms, and I took this as inspiration as well. Making a military and vintage inspired collection without making the audience feel like it was seeing something they recognized as such was very important to me. Keeping in mind that many designers make use of military references, a good part of my research was making sure not to echo the designs of others.

From makeup to shoes the little details are something that were quite important to me in creating and presenting my collection. My drawings for this collection incorporated figures with vaguely expressed faces. An eyebrow, nostril and hint of lip were all I used to delineate their expressions. This concentration on the lip really inspired my makeup. After deciding to concentrate on the lip I looked at many images of 1940's makeup. During this research, the idea of doing a classic with a twist came up. Carrying this idea through from my collection in my makeup seemed very rational. With every outfit in the collection being monochromatic, there are only six colors in the collection the lips added a little bit of a contrast, and helps to tie one outfit to another.

