

Fear Project Essay (Bridge 2)

By Shiva Trieu

My task was to design an article of clothing, made from paper, inspired by my partner's fear. Fear is an interesting topic because it shares an intimate relationship with our own insecurities. Many of our deepest fears are personal and it can be hard to open up to peers you have only known for a short period of time. Of course we can all spit out generic, surface level fears when asked, but to reveal the personal fears we have is challenging. My understanding was that a large part of the project was to see how deep we could delve into each other's psyche. How much we are able to unearth wholly depends on the type of person our partner turns out to be. I can admit that I did not reveal anything that truly scares me. Whether it was the fear of sounding too deep and pretentious, or just my own need for privacy, I am still uncertain. I assume Helen, my partner, did not reveal her innermost terror either when she told me that her fear was the dark. This is not to say that she does not truly fear the dark; although generic, having a fear of the dark is almost part of human nature and is still a fear I can relate to, considering I sleep next to the warm glow of my rock lamp. However, as me and Helen continued to talk about her fear, I found it was more specific than just the dark. What in fact scares her most about the dark, is the depletion of her senses and that someone could easily sneak up behind her. I felt I fully understood what she meant, and think it is genuinely strange when different people can relate to one another's fear, however random they may seem. Back home I have an extra fridge located in the corner of my garage where all the best drinks are kept. Late at night, after grabbing a drink, I have found myself sprinting to the door as soon as I switch off the lights, running away, when I know nothing is really there. The thought that someone might be behind me, almost manifests into a physical feeling, a chill in my spine.

With that in mind, I was inspired to make a gown with a long tail to alert her if anyone was to sneak up behind her. To make Helen feel more protected and for aesthetic appeal, I added shoulder guards, an idea inspired by the armory at the Metropolitan Museum. In the end, I regret choosing something that requires so much material to make, but am still proud of the results and what I gained in experience. I was ambitious in my efforts to make something that was both aesthetic and functional. It was my first project in which I got to experiment in fashion and I thought making a dress would help me learn some fundamentals of fashion design. Despite numerous snags, I was able to adapt and develop my prototypes into a functional robe/jacket.

My vision for the gown sprouted when Helen emphasized her back as region of the body associated with her fear. I tossed around the idea of a shield or a cape; however, in the end I felt those things did not match Helen's personality. After visiting the Met, I had several sketches ready to go and made the prototypes in class. I felt this process went quicker for me than some of my peers because of my decisiveness, a trait that can very quickly turn into recklessness. I tend to come up with one good idea and dive into it without considering other alternatives. Set on designing a dress, I chose paper towels as my material for both its low cost and its fabric-like texture. This was my first iteration of the dress, and I made it without using any measurements and without proper knowledge of what needed to be done. At this point, I really did not know what I was doing. I watched a few youtube videos, did what I thought looked

correct, and made something that resembled a loose fitting dress. The main hurdle during this process were all the perforations on the paper towels and it's tendency to tear. I had to tape two sheets of paper towels together to add thickness, as well as, carefully tape over each perforation. Then I had to tape the rows of paper towels together in order to make a square sheet I could cut a pattern for the gown from. It took some trial and error and more time than I had expected, but I was satisfied with the result. I believed this was affirmation that paper towels were the right material choice.

Unfortunately, the paper towels only worked so well because I did not actually sew anything in the initial prototype, and the dress was not form fitting. This was a realization I made only after considerable development of what I hoped was going to be my final iteration. I had asked a friend majoring in fashion to teach me how to drape a gown, cut a pattern, and properly piece it together. After learning some fundamentals, I was excited to try to make a real gown. I spent time again taping together the perforations and making large sheets of pieced together paper towels. When I was through draping and making patterns, I had to use the muslin patterns to cut the same shapes into the sheets of paper. Because the sheets were actually two paper towels laid over each other, I also had to tape together the sides again after cutting out the pieces out. The patterns I had designed were draped tightly and cut out with very exact measurements. I did not take into account that muslin is a far more elastic material than paper towels are, and after several hours of attempting to hand sew together the pieces, my tight dress was literally tearing at the seams. The paper towels were too flimsy to hold the tight stitches I was making. Even the long tail, the main design point concerning Helen's fear, did not last when I rolled the dress form around. It was made of only a single layer of paper towel and tore when in contact with practically anything. It was several hours before class, and I did not have time to add my original idea of armor-like shoulder guards. Rolling in the battered remains of an incomplete gown, I was hoping my professor would understand that, at the least, it was not for a lack of effort.

I was given a chance to improve my project and was determined to prove to myself that I could make what I had designed. I knew it was going to be a challenge from the start, and did not want to give up on the idea. I was inspired by some of the materials used by others in my class. Some of the rice papers had a very pliable texture and resembled fabric. Earlier, I had gone to Mood, a fabric store, in order to find a replacement for paper towels, but they did not have any fabrics made of strictly paper. After learning that they had purchased their materials at Blick, I was shocked I had not already thought of checking there. Blick has a diverse options of papers that mimic fabric, coming in different sizes and textures. I picked the one I thought was good balance of elasticity, durability, and cost. I still had the patterns that I cut from the muslin earlier, so I could skip the draping portion of the process. The sheets of paper I had bought were quite large so I only had to tape together two in order to cut out the patterns. Since they did not tear as easily as the paper towels, I only had to use one layer of material as well. Hand sewing the pieces together was extremely tedious and time consuming. To streamline that process I was resolute on learning how to use a sewing machine. Again, I sought the assistance of my friend and she taught me all the basics of sewing and set me up on a sewing machine. It was intimidating being in a room filled with fashion majors working on their senior thesis, while I was sewing together my paper dress hoping it did not look completely amateur. Despite the fact

that it probably did, I was glad I had finally reached out and learned how to use a sewing machine. It made the stitchings so much cleaner and significantly brought down the time it took me to make the gown. I was almost finished with the entire piece when I arrived at the last seam. It did not fit the dress form. It was my first time sewing together a seam and I did not match up the lines of the patterns perfectly. Not thinking the slight variance would alter the dress so drastically, I rushed through the sewing, thinking I had gotten the hang of it. By the end, the dress was at least a whole size smaller. I was having a panic attack; I could not take another complete failure after I had put in so much effort in making this article of clothing. My friend who helped me earlier was still around, thankfully, and recommended I just leave it open and make a long jacket. It was all I could do, so after a few alterations I transformed it into a something that can best be described as a kimono without sleeves and a long tail trailing behind. Regardless of the last minute adaptation, I had enough time to add the shoulder pieces. These consisted of three triangle shaped panels created from wire and paper. The panels were layered over each other and were attached by metal rings to allow for movement in the arms. The panels slightly curve around her arms, and lay parallel to her arms. They are also attached to the dress with metal rings so that the entire piece does not remain static. In order to close the jacket, I used the remaining paper to create a sash that ties around the waste.

By the resolution of this project, I was a little disappointed that I did not reach my goal of creating a dress, but I do take some solace in knowing that I was able to incorporate both design concepts addressing Helen's fear. A lot of this project ended up being research on the steps it takes to design an actual, functional article of clothing. To touch on just a few facets of what I learned throughout the steps of my project: the importance of prototyping, the importance material research, how to drape, how to cut a pattern, how to sew, how to take measurements and make adjustments, and to never use paper to make a dress again. It was frustrating to work for so long, and still not produce a perfectly made design, but I understand that, as a designer, this process of repetition is just a precursor of what is to come. As a photographer I have had interests in fashion, but after a first hand experience in making clothes I now know it is something I want to pursue further. I am glad I was able to use this project to explore fashion design. Ironically, the project was to identify and address the fear that my partner has, yet, I think I have done the opposite, and gained new inspiration.