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ESPOUSAL A LA MODE

by

Jessica Meyer

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts in Fashion Design
at
Lindenwood University

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ESPOUSAL A LA MODE

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Art and Design Department
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
at
Lindenwood University

By

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ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: Espousal a la Mode

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This thesis describes the creation of sculptural wedding gowns with the ultimate goal of highlighting the realities of marriage in a society where divorce is almost as common as sustaining said unions. These realities are represented by six marital problems visualized by the use of sculptural textures. The collection is built upon the concept that the foundation of the gown must be strong in order to support the fabric manipulations, just as the relationship of the couple must be strong in order to overcome the marital problem that each gown represents. The use of contemporary structures, mixed with traditional elements, such as fabric, silhouette, and color, create a uniquely blended collection reminiscent of traditional matrimonial designs, while simultaneously pushing forward into the future of this genre.

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Introduction

Throughout history, wedding gowns have followed fashion trends and the political milieu of each decade with brides striving for a perfect interpretation of “happily ever after.” Gowns chosen by brides portrayed the love between the happy couple, but what if a wedding gown could say more than “I love you;” what if a wedding gown could help protect you? On the wedding day, the couple is not focused on what comes next, just that they love each other, but this way of thinking is how so many end up divorced. We live in a world where so many women dream of perpetual marital bliss, but many do not have the understanding of the drive needed to make a marriage work. My collection forces the bride to not only consider these marital problems, but to make a public declaration that her relationship is strong enough to withstand the problem that her gown represents.

To understand the meaning behind wedding gowns, as well as the institution of marriage today, we must first look back on what wedding gowns and marriage have been in the past. Have wedding gowns and marriages been shaped by the political and social goings on over the last 80 years? I explore the meaning behind each style in each decade and why that particular style reigned during that time period. Once we understand why each style was so important to each decade, we need to understand why the wedding gown is such an icon for women of today. Brides imagine themselves in their wedding gowns, on their wedding days, as a perfect representation of themselves. How do brides achieve this level of perfection of their wedding day? This thesis will argue that it is by exploration of the silhouette. When a bride chooses her wedding gown, what is she really choosing? What is the meaning behind the gown; how can it be interpreted? Seeing the wedding gown as a semiotic myth forces us to break down the innate desire of most women to settle down and marry, to promise forever, even when forever is unknown.

Significance & Importance of the Wedding Dress

Over the course of the last century, a new silhouette or style for wedding gowns emerges each decade. This style is in direct response to the respective political and social events of each period witnessing a dramatic change in style since the 1950s. We begin with the 1950s when rules were set inhibiting a woman's right to personal growth in her marriage with the men returning home from World War II. Women were forced to follow guidelines set forth by her husband because society was striving for peaceful surroundings after a time of extreme turmoil.¹ However, to understand the mentality of the '50s, we must visit the '40s, the time during the war. During the span of War, marriages were a rushed affair, with couples marrying the week they met even though they were uncertain of a husband's safe return. Gowns at this time were practical due to the rations put on fabric and other goods. Many women wore borrowed gowns from the 1930s from friends or relatives. The gowns had no significance to the bride or the groom, especially since some couples barely knew each other. The most important aspect of the wedding at this time was the ceremony. With the rush to make the marriage official in a time of uncertainty, many women felt that it was their patriotic duty to deny themselves a formal wedding.²

Weddings in the 1950s were more elaborate. Men were returning from war and rations were being lifted ensuring access to previously scarce materials. This was the time of Dior's New Look, which had a great impact on fashion at this time. During the War, fashion was

¹ Helen Bradley Foster, "An Historic Perspective of English and Soviet Bridalwear Between 1917 and 1960" in *Wedding Dress Across Cultures* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), 141-156.

² Caroline Cox, "Forties Restraint, Fifties Froth," in *I Do-: 100 Years of Wedding Fashion*, (London: Scriptum Editions, 2002) 119-135

nonexistent; rations were put into place and couture houses closed their doors. When fashion resurfaced in the '50s, people celebrated. Hems became longer and skirts fuller; the ballerina skirt was popular. Women were married in gowns reminiscent of the nineteenth century: trainless, ankle-length gowns over crinolines with short, bouffant veils. Grace Kelly, married in 1956, aided in fueling this fantasy of an extravagant wedding.³ Due to the rise in weddings at this time, bridal salons began to open their doors, fulfilling the needs of everyday brides. Even though weddings in the '50s were more extravagant, marriages were strained because the '50s were a time of restriction for women. Men were returning from war, so the women were expected to return to the home. Some welcomed this domestic return, while still others longed for their newfound freedom. This led to unrest in the home, an unrest that carried over into the next decade.

Throughout most of the 1960s men and women continued the weddings and gown styles of the previous decade, never thinking of the stereotypical marital roles that they were about to assume. Soon the unrest that began stirring in the late '50s began to rise in the mid '60s. Younger generations began to rebel against the traditional expectations of their elder counterparts. Long-standing wedding traditions were uprooted giving way to earthier, more modern ceremonies, reflecting the new attitude of pro-love and peace. Brides elected for more natural, simpler options than previous generations. Cotton sheaths and peasant smocks replaced the traditional ballgowns. While brides were pursuing more modern options with their choice of silhouette and fabric, they were not completely able to break away from the security of tradition. Most brides still wore white, floor-length dresses even during a time when the institution of marriage was being questioned due to political and social upheaval.⁴

³ Maria Mellinger, "The Twentieth Century," in *The Wedding Dress*, (New York: Random House, 1993) 30-43

⁴ Maria Mellinger "The Twentieth Century," in *The Wedding Dress*, (New York: Random House, 1993), 30-43

The 1970s were a time of freedom. Women wanted to exalt independence and individuality, but were cautious due to the reaction of guests and family members. Some wanted to go so far as to wear blue jeans at the ceremony, but settled for more traditional garb.⁵ The sexual revolution that began in the late '60s carried over into the '70s. Divorce rates were high, and it was becoming increasingly socially acceptable not to marry. Modern wedding gowns became pure costume as the institution of marriage no longer commanded the gravitas of previous decades.⁶ Women were entering the work force, fighting for equality, and controlling their fertility through contraceptives. Sex had become a commonplace topic of discussion. Bridal magazines and salons almost became nonexistent, and when weddings were performed, much emphasis was placed on the details- the cake, the gown, and the decorations- all alluding to a theme of nostalgia.⁷

By the 1980s, feminism and countercultural ideas toward sex and marriage were reversed; slowly tradition began to reign. Women were working, so men were no longer the breadwinners of the households. Androgyny surfaced due to the power women felt, and the option of saying "no" took prevalence. However, many were saying "yes," and weddings were again on the rise.⁸ Weddings of the '80s became known as a time of excess, when glamour and exaggeration were in high demand. Full-sleeved and skirted gowns with tiny waists began to dominate in bridal fashion. Princess Diana married in the early '80s giving way to the dream of

⁵ Helen Bradley Foster, "Something Plain and Simple? Unpacking Custom-made Wedding Dresses from Western Canada (1950-1995)" in *Wedding Dress Across Cultures*,(Oxford: Berg, 2003), 5-21

⁶ Edwina Erhman, "Ready-to-Wear 1945-90," in *The Wedding Dress: 300 Years of Bridal Fashions*,(London: V & A Publishing, 2014) 129-159

⁷ Caroline Cox, "Counterculture Chic," in *I Do-: 100 Years of Wedding Fashion*,(London: Scriptum Editions, 2002) 189-205

⁸ Caroline Cox, "Modern Fairy Tales." in *I Do-: 100 Years of Wedding Fashion*,(London: Scriptum Editions, 2002) 241-258

fairytale becoming reality. The work of John Galliano and Issey Miake took center stage during this decade; voluminous traditional styles gained popularity yet again.⁹

In the 1990s women's search for wedding gowns became more trend-driven than in previous decades due to their age and growing independence. Gowns at this time were the most revealing with bare shoulders and plunging necklines. Women were aiding in designing their own gowns, thus further asserting their individuality and independence. The belief in "happily ever after" began to fade in the '90s as second, third, and even fourth marriages gained social acceptance, but the desire for the security and pleasure that a marriage offered still remained.¹⁰

From the 2000s to the present, women are marrying at an older age. Because they are older, they know the styles and silhouettes that work best for their body type and are not willing to compromise their own personal style for what is trending now. They are searching for a gown that is timeless, a dress that represents their personality. Weddings are more personalized; they are designed to reflect the relationship and personality of the bride and groom through a strong reliance on symbolism.¹¹ Brides want to evoke as much personality in their wedding as possible, which is why theme weddings are becoming more and more popular. Weddings are a fantasy, a perfect representation of the self for the bride and groom. Because there are so many styles trending for wedding gowns in today's society, how do brides know which silhouette to choose in order to look and feel their best on their special day?

⁹ Caroline Cox, "Counterculture Chic," in *I Do-: 100 Years of Wedding Fashion*, (London: Scriptum Editions, 2002) 189-205

¹⁰ Maria Mellinger, "The Twentieth Century," in *The Wedding Dress*, (New York: Random House, 1993) 30-43

¹¹ Helen Bradley Foster, "The American Groom Wore a Celtic Kilt: Theme Weddings as Carnavalesque Events," in *Wedding Dress Across Cultures*, (Oxford: Berg, 2003) 207-218

The Wedding Dress as a Perfect Interpretation of Self

According to a recent article published on Daily Mail in February 2014, six in ten women begin planning their trip down the aisle before meeting their groom, and 49% of women admit to selecting their wedding gown. What makes the wedding gown so important? Why do women spend most of their lives envisioning themselves wearing a white gown walking down an aisle? Mellinger states the wedding gown represents the perfect interpretation of self. Women can spend almost a year searching for the perfect gown, a gown that will aid her in looking her best on her special day.

The search for the perfect wedding gown begins and ends with the silhouette. Choosing the correct silhouette and style of gown sets the tone and mood of the wedding. The understanding of how each silhouette works for each body type is essential because, after all, it is the role of the wedding gown to enhance the bride's natural beauty. As Mellinger relates, "The most popular silhouette is the traditional ball gown which evokes romantic images ranging from fairytale princesses to Scarlett O'Hara to Princess Diana as a royal bride."¹² The ball gown features a full circular skirt supported by hoops or petticoats. This gown is the most popular because it is the most easily altered to fit a variety of body types and gives the bride an instant hourglass figure.

While the ball gown is the most formal of silhouettes, the sheath is a less formal alternative for brides with excellent figures. This silhouette contours to the body and is worn without excessive undergarments; however, the gown is less comfortable due to its constricting nature. The sheath is chosen by the most daring and self-confident brides. The A-line is a cross between the ball gown and the sheath and was introduced by Dior when she created the dress

¹²Maria Mellinger, "Style and Shape," in *The Wedding Dress*, (New York: Random House, 1993) 75-78

embodies graded his silhouettes.¹³ This type of silhouette mimics the sheath in that it is fitted in the bodice, then has a gentle flare at the waist, requiring a high-waisted petticoat to aid in the gentle flare of the skirt. Like the ball gown, this silhouette works well with most body types, especially petite brides because its elongated lines give the illusion of length.

The empire silhouette is reminiscent of eighteenth-century designs for royalty, with its high-waisted design falling directly under the bust line.¹⁴ The style works well for brides when contrasting fabrics are used for the bodice and the skirt, such as a lace bodice with a plain, and many times chiffon skirt. Most empire skirts are created using several layers of lightweight, flowing fabric. The layering aids in emphasizing the understated line of the silhouette. Many empire gowns are used in destination or beach weddings due to their casual and flowing nature.

The final silhouette is the most modern, always worn with a jacket. The suit has many variations, as it can be a combination of a mini dress with a jacket or a skirt and blouse with a coat; some women even choose to wear pants with this silhouette. The suit is most popular for civil ceremonies, second/third marriages, or for women with a tailored sense of style.¹⁵

The length of the skirt also adds to the look and feel of the gown. A more nontraditional bride may wear a shorter gown, while a more adventurous bride may wear a mini dress. Once the bride discovers which silhouette works best for her in terms of fit and style, she then must turn her attention to the gown's personality – the fabric, embellishments and accessories. The appropriate silhouette leads to the best fit, and the best fit leads to the “perfect bride.” What does

¹³ Maria Mellinger, "Style and Shape," in *The Wedding Dress*,(New York: Random House, 1993) 75-78

¹⁴ Maria Mellinger, "Style and Shape," in *The Wedding Dress*,(New York: Random House, 1993) 75-78

¹⁵ Maria Mellinger, "Style and Shape," in *The Wedding Dress*,(New York: Random House, 1993) 75-78

the illusion of the “perfect bride” mean to the world; better yet, what does the wedding gown represent to women?

Semiotics of the Wedding Dress

Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols and how they are interpreted in objects.¹⁶ The wedding gown can be interpreted in many different ways and by many different women in many different cultures, but one interpretation is universal: the thought of “happily ever after.” As mentioned in the previous section, most young girls dream about their wedding day, specifically their wedding dress. What makes a wedding gown a universal sign of marriage and the promise of marital bliss? If we interpret the wedding gown as a myth, we first see the gown as a whole; we see the fabric, the embellishments, what makes each gown unique. When we begin pulling back the layers of the myth, we see wedding gowns are so much more. They are a promise of forever; they represent happiness, fidelity, honesty, love, all of the good things that men and women dream marriage will bring.

In first seeing the choice of fabric and embellishments, we are able to decipher the type of wedding that the bride is planning and her personality. According to Mellinger a fairytale bride will choose a dress made of expensive materials – silk and lace, heavy embellishment – and will strive for perfection and her dream wedding. The wedding will typically be a more formal affair. A more casual bride will choose a gown made of cotton and minimally designed; the wedding is less formal. Brides who desire this type of wedding are very calm and go with the flow; they do not get caught up in the fussy details. Even though both of these gowns are

¹⁶ Mieke Bal, *Art History and Its Theories*, The Art Bulletin, Vol. 78, No. 1. (Mar., 1996), pp. 6-25.

extremely different, they communicate the same thing to society: happy bride, happy wedding, happily ever after.¹⁷

When we begin to pull back the layers of the myth of a wedding gown even further, we see what couples hope a marriage will bring them: unconditional love. Weddings bring a sense of love to all who are witness to the union. For those who are married, seeing the bride in her wedding gown brings a sense of nostalgia for the day when they said their vows and walked down the aisle to the one person they felt would love them forever. For those who are not married, seeing a bride walk down the aisle leads them to envision themselves walking down the aisle to the one person who will love them forever. Everyone longs for love, and when couples marry, they commit to love each other unconditionally forever.¹⁸

The wedding gown can bring a sense of security; during times of great political change women held fast to the tradition of the wedding gown as it provided comfort in uncertain times. The knowledge that she is performing a time-honored tradition repeated through decades and generations, gives the bride a sense of security on her wedding day.¹⁹ This sense of security can also come from the choice of the gown. The bride will shine and feel secure in herself when she knows she is walking down the aisle in a perfect representation of herself.²⁰ Purity is yet another layer to the myth of the wedding gown. Most first-time brides choose to wear white. During the Victorian era white became known as a representation of the bride's virginity, but white can also symbolize the purity of the couple's relationship or the bride never having married before. Many second and third time brides elect to wear other less-traditional colors or silhouettes because of

¹⁷ Maria Mellinger, "Style and Shape," in *The Wedding Dress*,(New York: Random House, 1993) 75-78

¹⁸ Caroline Cox, "Introduction," in *I Do-: 100 Years of Wedding Fashion*,(London: Scriptum Editions, 2002) 9-23

¹⁹ Caroline Cox, "Forties Restraint, Fifties Froth," in *I Do-: 100 Years of Wedding Fashion*,(London: Scriptum Editions, 2002) 114-135

²⁰ Maria Mellinger, "Style and Shape," in *The Wedding Dress*,(New York: Random House, 1993) 75-78

the embarrassment wearing white could bring to them. Some women with children feel uncomfortable wearing white because they think they are not “pure.” Many men prefer their brides to be more modest on their wedding day; they do not want the world to see what they think is for their eyes only.²¹

Pulling back the layers even further, we can see the vows that the couple makes to each other on their wedding day, vows of honesty and fidelity. On their wedding day, couples promise to be true to each other in good times and bad. In today’s society, the couple is only thinking about the good times and their happily ever after, but happily ever after does not exist. Real life exists, which includes fights, problems, and struggle. What is left after the wedding and honeymoon are over and real life sets in is a marriage. Through my collection, I want couples to think about what real life with their future spouse will really be. I do not want them to just think about this type of life leading up to the wedding, but on their wedding day when they are promising each other forever. I want couples to think about what forever really means.

Literature Review

While researching my collection, I discovered two artists to aid in my discovery and work. The first is Christian Dior (1905-1957) who designed the *New Look*, a look that sparked a new age movement when our nation was rising from tragedy. His work is where my research began, and his classic use of silhouette and structure aided in my design process. The second is Roberto Capucci (1930-), an Italian fashion designer, who shocked the world with his structural gowns, traditional techniques, and experimentation of silhouette.

²¹ Caroline Cox, "Edwardian Extravagance," in *I Do-: 100 Years of Wedding Fashion*, (London: Scriptum Editions, 2002) 27-43

Christian Dior created the controversial *New Look* in 1947. He wanted to break away from the fashion of the time and reinvent the fashion of the nineteenth century. According to Breward, Dior desired a more feminine silhouette in a time when men were returning home from war, women were reentering the home, and gender roles were being questioned. He created dresses with wide, structured skirts and broad shoulders, drawing attention to small waists. Dior drew much inspiration from nature. Breward summarizes Dior's style as "a commitment to the luxurious use of textiles in terms of quantity and quality," with garments that reflected ideas of femininity by creating sculptural forms over the natural lines of the woman's body reflect romance and nostalgia.²²

Roberto Capucci was one of the first Italian Couture designers when he entered the world of fashion design at only eighteen years of age. Before becoming a designer, Capucci's parents wanted him to become a lawyer, but his passion was with architecture and art. Blum describes how Capucci took the Italian fashion world by surprise with his innovative and imaginative designs and quickly became one of the biggest sellers in the American market. Capucci eventually gave up designing for the fashion world in 1980. The world of couture had become underappreciated, and he did not want to compromise his vision for commercial success.²³

Both Dior and Capucci drew inspiration from nature and architecture. Capucci's works have been described as having "stunning fabrics, inventive pleating, and elegant sculptural silhouettes."²⁴ Blum stresses that Capucci's designs are void of prints enabling him to rely more heavily on the fabric and colors. His gowns are meticulously sewn together, and before

²² Christopher Breward, "Fashion Capitals." in *Fashion*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 169-216

²³ Dilys Blum, and Roberto Capucci, "Roberto Capucci: Art into Fashion" (Philadelphia, Pa.: Philadelphia Museum of Art 2011)

²⁴ Dilys Blum, and Roberto Capucci, "Roberto Capucci: Art into Fashion" (Philadelphia, Pa.: Philadelphia Museum of Art 2011)

construction begins, he spends countless hours, yards of fabric, and thousands of dollars in order to perfect his techniques. He resurrected the art of press pleating and is now known for his mastery of pleating. Capucci does not feel that he needs to sell his gowns to be successful; just witnessing the exploitation of the possibilities of fabric is satisfaction enough. Unlike Dior, Capucci did not draw from the traditional silhouette and lines of the form. Instead, he preferred tall and slim women, so he could more easily experiment with silhouette without the worry of curves.

While creating my collection, I employed techniques used by both Dior and Capucci. Several of my gowns needed to be draped using paper because fabric did not supply enough structure. This method is used by Capucci when he is designing three-dimensional forms as he takes a more geometric and architectural approach to design, which has inspired me to do the same. Just as I research and attempt my different techniques to create my structures, Capucci spent hours perfecting his press-pleating method with his seamstresses. Dior understood the need for a strong understructure to support his gowns. I used boning and several types of interfacing in my structures just as Dior used wire and whalebone. Many of my first sketches for my collection were reminiscent of Capucci's work. I then built off of the original sketches to create my own structural forms based off of his time-honored techniques. Unlike Capucci, my work is almost completely void of organic figures. I tend to focus on structure and line, more classic elements much like Christian Dior. However, much like Capucci, my designs rely heavily on silhouette, fabric, and color, and are void of print. I have drawn from Dior's use of traditional silhouettes and structured forms following the natural curves of the body, while pulling toward Capucci in the structural forms on each of the gowns.

Methodology

Those who marry feel their relationship is strong enough to be able to overcome marital problems that arise and surpass the national divorce statistic that is about 40-50 percent, according to the American Psychological Association. I plan to achieve the visual representation of marital problems by creating sculptural gowns. These gowns will have an added three-dimensional quality, giving them a dramatic effect. All wedding gowns need a strong foundation to support the weight of the gown and to aid the gown in highlighting the woman's figure. The foundation of the gown is similar to the foundation of a marriage. If the couple's marriage and relationship is strong, then the marriage will overcome the problem each gown represents, just as each gown's foundation must be strong to support the structure. The foundation for each gown is customized in order to give the best support possible, but all are cut on the princess line to ensure the best fit. Mellinger addresses structural support in the following:

The best gowns are made with both an inner body and outer body. The inner body is the support system; it holds the boning, the facing, and the petticoat, which is often sewn directly into the best gowns.²⁵

I have created gowns that are as strong and beautiful on the inside as they are on the outside. While creating each gown, I would begin with the strong inner support system and slowly worked my way outward.

The first gown in my collection is *Blind Love* (Figure 1), which is symbolic of the couple blindly entering into the marriage thinking that love is enough to make a marriage work. This gown was created using several forms of inner support and is characterized by being a tea-length ballerina skirt created using taffeta. Because the gown is strapless, an inner corset is hand-sewn between the lining and the outer fabric in order to give the gown enough support to stay in place on the bride due to the weight of the gown. The inner corset is constructed using boning and

²⁵ Maria Mellinger, "Art of Construction," in *The Wedding Dress*, (New York: Random House, 1993) 88-91

canvas fabric. The canvas fabric is heavy and holds its shape well. In order to obtain maximum support, the corset is cut on the princess line, while the boning is placed at each seam. The more boning the corset contains, the better the support. Another underlying structure of this gown is the tulle skirt used beneath the gown. This gives the gown the volume needed to achieve the ballerina skirt. The structured caged-sleeve of this gown is created using boning and faux silk. The faux silk is used to create the casing that covers the boning. The boning is then sewn together in strips of six, and formed around the arm of the model. The boning strips are hand-sewn together. The origami flowers sewn onto the skirt of the gown are created using squares of fabric sewing together to eliminate raw edges. The squares are then ironed into petal shapes and sewn together. It takes six petals to create each individual flower, which are hand-sewn to the skirt of the gown in a sweeping motion in order to create visual movement in the gown.

The second gown in the collection is *Jealousy* (Figure 2). This gown represents the feeling couples get when they see their significant other with another person. The gown is characterized by an A-Line and is created using faux silk, bamboo skewers, and organza. The foundation for this gown is built into it. The base of the gown is made of faux silk and then cut into sections in order to support the structural triangles. The triangles are built using two strips of faux silk draped on the form using paper. A layer of interfacing is ironed in between the two strips of faux silk to give added support. The strips are sewn together; an added stitch in the seam allowance of each strip creates a tunnel for the bamboo skewers to be inserted. The bamboo skewers give the strips the desired triangle shape. Once all of the structured triangles are formed, they are attached to the sections of the base. The sections of the base are sewn together creating the front and back panels of the gown. The sides of the gown are created using

organza sewn with a French seam in order to eliminate raw edges and to give audience a view of the woman's figure beneath the structured triangles.

The third gown in the collection is *Resentment* (Figure 3). The layering of organza squares in this gown is representative of how resentment can build if jealousy is left unchecked. The base of this gown is created in a similar fashion to that of *Jealousy*. The gown is broken up into sections using faux silk. The princess seams are sewn together creating long strips resembling bands on the gown. Organza is then cut into square figures and two layers are adhered together using heat and bond, a type of clear interfacing. The organza square figures are serged using a narrowed rolled hem in order to eliminate a raw edge and then draped and layered onto the form overlapping each other. Each layer is sewn to its corresponding banded base, and then the bases are sewn together. The process is repeated until all the bands have been sewn together.

The fourth gown in the collection is *Communication* (Figure 4). This gown demonstrates the way communication falls apart in the marriage. This gown is characterized by having a sheath silhouette and created using faux silk and a technique called "smocking." "Smocking" can be created in many ways and formed into many patterns. I chose a traditional technique which entails fan-folding the fabric into pleats. The pleats are ironed to create sharp creases in the fabric, and then every other pleat is hand-tacked in alternating rows to create a diamond effect. As the diamonds follow the contour of the body, they become larger until they eventually fall away completely leaving folds in the gown. The "smocking" technique is only used on half of the front and the opposite half of the back of the gown to create a balance in the gown and not overpower the woman with the "smocking" effect.

The fifth gown in the collection is *Monotony* (Figure 5). This gown is the most repetitive because it represents the boring everydayness of marriage. The gown is a form-fitting sheath created using taffeta and organza. The base of the gown is created with the organza with a French seam to conceal all raw edges. Circles, cut with a laser cutter to remove raw edges, are hand-sewn onto the gown creating the detailed layer of the gown and hiding all the imperfect modest areas a woman may want to hide.

The sixth and final gown in the collection is *Infidelity* (Figure 6). This gown is the final blow to the marriage. The man has cheated on the woman because the marital problems have become too much to handle; the marriage has fallen apart. The gown is a mermaid silhouette and formed using faux silk and creates a type of armor for the woman. The base is simply cut on the princess line gives the pyramids a structure to hold their shape. Each pyramid in the first tier is formed using four triangles adhered to woven interfacing sewn together and then sewn to the base then the bases are sewn together. The second tier is created in a similar manner except the pyramids are formed using only three triangles. The bottom tier is formed using two trapezoids and interfacing to force them to create a pyramid shape.

Production and Analysis

Before the design process can begin, a designer must first clearly define their target market. A defined target market forces the designer to design within the parameters of who will be buying their work. The target market for *Espousal a la Mode* is an independent woman between the ages of 25 and 40 living in Los Angeles, CA. She is very well-educated with a bachelor's degree and most likely a master's. Her annual income is between \$100,000 and \$120,000 with a disposable income of roughly \$30,000 because she only has herself to support. After tackling the workforce, this woman has met the man she plans to spend the rest of her life

with, but she is not quite ready to give up her personal freedom. She has very strong opinions and ideas and does not plan to compromise them after marriage. This woman is not opposed to having children in the future as she still has much she wants to accomplish before starting a family. Her hobbies include visiting art museums and exhibitions and shopping for high-end brands, such as Gucci, Dior, and Louis Vuitton. She works hard for her money and is not willing to sacrifice quality for quantity. This woman is also very health conscience; she strives to maintain a well-balanced diet and exercise regularly. Her favorite forms of exercise include running and biking. She has her own distinct style and is not afraid to go against the grain and take risks when it comes to fashion.

Once the target market is clearly defined, the concept can begin to take shape. The gowns I am creating force the woman to think about the reality that comes after the ceremony and the infatuation fades. I want to create gowns that evoke feelings and transmit emotions that result from marriage. Each gown feeds into the next, telling the story of a failed marriage. I have woven the gowns together by my use of color and shape. The collection begins with a pale pink gown covered in origami flowers followed by a grey-blue gown where the flowers have morphed into triangles with hints of pink peeking through the backside of the triangles. This gown is followed by a grey-blue and cream gown covered in forms converted from triangles to something similar to squares followed by a cream gown covered in diamonds that grow larger and eventually fall away with hints of pale blue. Following this gown is a cream and pale pink gown where the fallen diamonds resurface as circles and finally an all cream gown made up of pyramids.

I chose to use pale-pink, grey-blue and cream for my color palette because I did not want to venture too far away from a traditional wedding color scheme. If I were to have chosen red or

purple, my audience may have thought that I was making evening gowns. I wanted a clear distinction between my gowns and other *avant-garde* creations. I chose specifically to use pale-pink because it is a nontraditional color used in wedding gowns and grey-blue because, in my research, I learned that white did not always symbolize purity, but blue does. It was only after Queen Victoria wore white to her wedding that white was associated with weddings and purity becoming the ideal wedding-gown shade.²⁶ Finally, I chose to use cream because I wanted to use a traditional color associated with weddings that was not pure white. The same goes for my fabric choices. I chose to use very traditional wedding gown fabrics transformed into three-dimensional sculptural pieces.

In the beginning of the collection/ marriage there is *Blind Love* (Figure 1); this is the naive thought that a marriage can survive on love alone or the bliss of the newlyweds. *Blind Love* is visually represented by the entire gown being created using pale pink, a color associated with love. The silhouette of this gown, the ballerina skirt, is one of the most popular silhouettes for wedding gowns, and the skirt is completely covered in flowers to further impress the innocence of the gown. I chose to create the particular origami flower on this dress for several reasons. First, I needed a structured flower to go along with my sculptural theme; this led me to research origami flowers. While researching, I was looking for a particular flower, I needed one that could be recreated using fabric and laid flat so it could be sewn to the skirt of a gown. Finally, I wanted a flower that visually portrays the innocence that I wanted the gown to embody.

If *Blind Love* is not cultivated, *Jealousy* (Figure 2) will develop. At this stage in the marriage, the couple is still happy in their marriage; it is a thought of wanting their spouse all to themselves. This can lead to a spouse attempting to control the other's actions or who the other

²⁶ Mellinger, Maria. "The Victorian Era." In *The Wedding Dress*, 24-30. New York: Random House, 1993, 24.

person is allowed see in their spare time. *Jealousy* is represented by the structured triangles. The sharp points of the triangles represent the sharp pang of jealousy felt by the spouse. The hill and valley effect of the triangles depicts that love is still present in the marriage and jealousy is only present for a short period of time and then fades away. The use of the pink on the underside of the triangles also shows that love is still present in the marriage. The darker pink shows that the love is not as innocent as when the marriage first began, more emotions and experiences have been added coloring the marriage. The silhouette of this gown is an A-Line, which is very triangular in shape.

If *Jealousy* is not kept in check, *Resentment* (Figure 3) will begin to build. When one spouse keeps the other from activities or opportunities due to jealousy and selfishness, *Resentment* will begin building slowly, progressing more quickly as time passes, pressing more heavily on the couple. *Resentment* is slowly built over time just as the layering of the square like forms slowly build up over the entire gown. The forms are created using organza, which is an opaque fabric. When the forms are built on top of each other, new colors form due to the layering. This represents the multiple layers of *Resentment* and how each layer reflects and builds on the previous.

From *Resentment*, *Communication* (Figure 4), or rather the lack thereof, takes hold. When couples are unhappy with each other, they will pull away, making communication more difficult. Before couples marry, *Communication* flows easily between the couple. When the everyday stresses of life begin, *Communication* becomes more difficult, and a lack of *Communication* can easily form as a result of the jealousy and resentment present in the marriage. At this point in the marriage, the couple is struggling to make their marriage work among the stresses of life. *Communication* is depicted through the diamonds. When

Communication is easy, the diamonds are formed closely together. As *Communication* becomes more difficult, the diamonds become larger, until finally all forms of *Communication* cease to exist, or the diamonds fall away completely.

When couples are not communicating *Monotony* (Figure 5) of life or sexuality begins to take effect. If a spouse feels they are being ignored due to a lack of *Communication*, they will not want to be intimate with the other. At this point the everydayness and repetitiveness of the marriage has taken effect, and the couple is becoming unhappy in the marriage. If the couple is having sex, it is to fill a physical need, not out of passion or love. At this stage, the sex is hurried and dispassionate. *Monotony* is represented using the circles that have resurfaced after the diamonds of *Communication* have fallen away. The circles are repeated throughout the entirety of the gown in one color in order to represent the sameness or everydayness of the marriage. The circles overlap but do not completely cover the gown. This creates negative space and gives a feeling of emptiness. This gown is a form fitting sheath and is the most revealing. This demonstrates a final attempt at the attention needed from the spouse.

If a marriage makes it to this point, the spouse feels the need to go searching for an intimate relationship that fills the desire to feel loved and wanted. This stage is *Infidelity* (Figure 6). Once the couple has made it to this stage, the marriage has fallen apart. Love no longer exists in the marriage. This gown is built as an armor to protect the heart of the fallen spouse living in a failed marriage. This “armor” is built using pyramids. The pyramids are placed in order to show off the woman’s figure because she is not hiding, but she does not want anyone to get too close.

All of the above-mentioned gowns are constructed upon an inner foundation. This inner foundation must be strong in order to support the three-dimensional structures built on the

gowns. All wedding gowns are built with a strong inner structure to support the gown. This inner foundation is the metaphor for the entire collection or marriage. In order for the marriage to survive through all the marital and life issues the couple must face, the relationship – and the individuals in that relationship – must be strong. The couple must be willing to make the effort to keep the marriage going once the everydayness of life begins. The couple finds this strength and desire inside themselves and their relationship.

In order to display this concept in a runway setting, several factors needed to be controlled, but as in all runway shows, some variables are unavoidable. To set the tone for my collection, I chose *Storm Song* by Phidel. This song is a story of a woman who has made mistakes in her relationship, which caused her to lose her lover. Throughout the song, she is admitting her mistakes and begging for forgiveness. Choosing this song was difficult because I needed something with a strong tempo to set the pace for the models, while at the same time communicating my theme to my audience. The song needed to be edited so the beat drops earlier after the introduction of the song setting the tempo for the collection earlier in the show. The song also needed to be extended to account for the amount of time each model will spend on the runway. Another effect I plan to employ to aid in setting the tone of my show to my audience is to send a flower girl down the runway in a white gown dropping rose petals.

The hair and makeup for my models was another factor, which I was able to control. I gave hair and makeup direction inspired by John Galliano (1960-) during his time with Dior. This makeup was chosen because it is a more *avant-garde* representation of dramatic makeup. I felt this representation would push my collection from being light and pretty dresses to *avant-garde* gowns. In addition, the stark contrast of the makeup to the gowns shows the ease of the marriage to an outsider while underneath lay the issues of the marriage. The choice to have buns

was purely aesthetic. Each model will have a veil, and I did not want the hair to interfere with the visual representation of the wedding gown.

A few factors outside of my control include lighting and models. These factors can only be controlled when the runway show is planned by and solely for you. Because the fashion show not only includes me but eight other designers, lighting is generic and chosen by the fashion show coordinator. Most fashion show lighting is generic in that the runway is illuminated and nothing else. The decision of models is a similar situation. While we hire professional models and conducted model calls, we cannot control who is available for the day of the fashion show and their level of talent. Also, as previously stated the fashion show showcases eight other designers who need talented models as well.

Ideally I would have displayed my gowns in my gallery exhibition, but because the exhibition opened the week before my fashion show, I elected to go another route to preserve the element of surprise for the fashion show. I chose to display my muslins in their imperfect forms. I wanted to give my audience a taste of my collection while communicating my concept. In order for my audience to better understand my concept I used typical objects associated with weddings such as fine china and candles broken and destroyed around my muslins. I hung broken china from the ceiling to display the destroyed marriage in front of the gallery window. In between the two hung china installations, I placed podiums containing my sketch book and an album containing the illustrations and flats for each gown in the collection. This is so my audience is better able to visualize my collection and understand my process. A table was placed in the center of my exhibition space with broken candles, two place settings using broken china and silverware, and calla lilies in the center to display give a my audience a visual of the broken marriage. I designed my exhibition, so my audience is forced to walk around a set of walls in

order to fully view my space. On the inside of the wall, I placed my most dramatic gown flanked by dried roses on either side hanging upside down. Roses are given to express friendship, desire, and love; the upside down dried roses represent the opposite. The roses were hung in a random pattern showing the viewer how no one can predict what problems the couple will encounter next with hills and valleys of life in between.

Conclusions

After examining my exhibition in completion, I was able to realize a few flaws in my design plan. I laid out the exhibition so that my audience would have entered the space on the left of the walls separating my space from that of the seniors. The space in which I desired my audience to walk was far smaller than the space on the right of the walls. I should have either moved the walls closer to the right or designed the space with a different entrance in mind. In my hanging installations, I did not repeat the hill and valley effect I used while hanging the roses. This effect would have carried my theme over to the installation. Another issue with the installation was the way in which I hung the china from the ceiling. I used fishing line hot glued in between card stock squares and the china. I should have sanded the china to give it a rough texture to support just the fishing line and hot glue. I struggled with the placement of podiums in the space. I was limited to eight since I was sharing the space with eight other students plus the students exhibiting on the second floor of the J. Scheidegger Center. I was forced to place one gown higher than the others and place my business cards and invitations behind my sketchbook instead of in front of my artist statement which I had previously planned. If I would not have had the constraints of the Boyle Gallery, I would have shown my collection in an all black room with spot lights on each gown. The forms the gowns were placed on would have been clear or cut away and hanging from the ceiling so the gowns would have the appearance of floating.

After watching the playback of the fashion show, there is not much that I would have changed. One problem I noticed was the inexperience of the models; this did not detract from my gowns as one would think. It added to the overall feeling I wanted my audience to experience. I was forced to share models with other students due to last minute cancelations, and this affected the make up for those models. This was also out of my control. The use of the flower girl before my collection worked perfectly. My audience was charmed by the young girl and were expecting to see more traditional wedding attire; this was the setting I wanted to give my collection an element of surprise.

To reiterate, wedding gowns of the past have been influenced by political goings on of each decade feeding into each other, whereas today women elect to chose a style that is most becoming to themselves and their personality. However, to discover this perfect bridal vision, brides must be willing to spend time and effort searching for the correct silhouette to aid in highlighting her natural beauty just as brides spend time and effort searching for their groom. The bridal gown aiding in the idealized version of self is only the surface layer of the myth of the wedding gown. To better understand brides we must pull back the layers to uncover the significance of the wedding gown. Understanding this significance can then lead brides in realizing the reasons behind their desires to marry. It will push them past their wedding day to see the real life struggles that are present in marriage, and ideally it will help them realize that the strength to overcome these struggles is in each person and relationship.

Illustrations



Figure 1. Blind Love, Size 8, Taffeta, faux silk, and boning, 2015



Figure 2. Jealousy, Size 8, faux silk, bamboo skewers, and organza, 2015



Figure 3. Resentment, Size 8, faux silk and organza, 2015



Figure 4. Communication, Size 8, faux silk, 2015



Figure 5. Monotony, Size 8, organza and taffeta, 2015



Figure 6. Infidelity, Size 8, faux silk, 2015

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