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Title of Submission: A Lockdown Dream

Subcategory: Industrial Design

Description:

On 26/06/2021, Sydney went into lockdown. With only 4 hours to decide on a creative outlet for the (then predicted) next 2 weeks, I took to my sketchbook and began designing a dream dress. Working on it for the next few months, it became a child's vision of a princess; elegance and confidence tightened with a ribbon and adorned with glittery red roses. It has no significant purpose, no life changing element, but this dress embodies a dream of a fantasy I once had, and inspires me to persevere with all the little things in my life.

Please note: This project was never meant to be anything more than a lockdown hobby, so many of the photos of my process were never meant to be shown to anyone past close friends and family.

I apologise if any of the photos offend anyone for any reason, though none should be deemed inappropriate.

This is not a report, or anything that is meant to be graded by an academic board. Rather, this is a sort of diary that captures my creative process and result.

If you only wish to see the **result**, go to **page 21-26**

A **final message/reflection** can be found on **page 27**

The original sketches (pictured below) were inspired by the many dresses I had seen while shopping for a formal dress. However, disliking the original design, I reattempted the dress for a more fantasy style red dress, with small golden roses made of satin to line the collar and waist. The sleeves were to be long and flowing, not unsimilar to the elves of “The Lord of the Rings” and “The Hobbit” by J. R. Tolkein and their respective films.



My first issue came with picking material. With only 2 hours before lockdown would come into effect, I could not choose to be too picky with colour or fabric. Originally going with dark red tulle in mind, product availability caused me to go with 8m of peach tulle instead. Partnered with 50cm of golden satin to attempt to make flowers, and some neutral base material to create patterns, I returned home with lockdown beginning on my heels. With the materials I had purchased in mind, I created a new sketch with a more realistic design considering my purchase. I took the time to look through Pinterest (a flourishing source of inspiration) and created a board to look to for design styles.

Board: <https://pin.it/6xmY0f0> (if your interested)



I had (and still have) little to no experience in this field, most knowledge coming from childhood sewing by hand, textile class and a few videos from social media, but I threw myself into the project. I began by using another dress I bought second hand that fits me perfectly as a very basic pattern for the bodice. Using scrap material I drew it out with permanent markers, and pinned it together to check the fit. Transferring it over to the neutral material took time and patience, but eventually I got it all sewed together in something that faintly resembled a bodice.



(My dog made himself useful by lying on every piece of material I was using, pins and all)

Measuring the circumference of the bodice, I figured out the skirt (at least at my waist) would need to be about 76cm. By holding the material against my body in a mirror, I figured out that I wanted the length to be around 120cm (that includes seam allowance and margin of error) and cut 6 lengths (each at 120cm) to use for the skirt. I sewed the lengths together, creating a large circle almost 10m in circumference. I set this aside to use after I finished the bodice.



(And again, lying on the mountain of peach tulle)

Using 4 sections of tulle, I began the process of draping and pinning the material along the bodice, which soon proved difficult without a mannequin or body base. I quickly rectified the situation by wrapping my bodice to a sleeping bag and pinning it in place. Sewing a few stitches at the top and bottom to secure the fabric to the neutral material, I was able to quickly create a comfortable flexible bodice.



(I was... surprised at how well the sleeping bag fit the bodice. I had never thought I resembled a sleeping bag before.)

To recreate many of my childhood dreams, I wanted the bodice to be lace up. This would also allow me to not rely on having a particular body shape to wear this dress. Finding eyelets and an applier buried in sewing kits, I marked out positions and inserted them into the neutral material, slightly covered by the tulle to hide the seams. Using an old thin ribbon, I was able to fasten it all together comfortably. I was finally able to try on the bodice for the first time since beginning to work with the tulle, and commemorated this by an ironic duck face mirror selfie.



(I would include literally any other photo, but I don't have any of this step other than this one.)

After trying on the bodice, and wearing it for a short period of time, I found it often collapsed in on itself, causing it to crinkle and the lace up back to become uneven. I could see the stress on the eyelets, so I found some plastic corset boning I had bought previously, cutting 5 sections to put at the front centre, sides and very back. Casing it in pockets made of the neutral material, I hand sewed it to the bodice so as to not show through the tulle on the outside. The stiff boning helped the bodice maintain position, and was an interesting sewing experience all together.



By this time, I had become reasonably engrossed in the process, so when I found an adjustable mannequin on Facebook Marketplace, I bought it to hold the dress. And named it.



(I like to think I'm funny, but in retrospect I think lockdown was driving me crazy)

The next step was to create a skirt, and following others I had seen online, I planned on using the pleating foot on my sewing machine to get the desired effect. However, I quickly realised that I did not own a pleating foot, so I ended up doing it by hand. After about 2-3m of hand pleating, with desperate hand sewing followed by machine lines, I grew tired of the strenuous process, choosing to guesstimate the bunches and sewing around the now shorter circle to maintain thread strength.

However, I ran into a massive problem at this stage. When creating the skirt to fit perfectly on my waist, I never had considered the process of putting it on and taking it off, causing me to think creatively in solving the problem. Finding some small hooks amongst other clasps, I released 10cm of the tulle, allowing enough room for it to comfortably be slipped on and off. Fastening the hooks on either side of the gap, it allowed a small pocket that could be hidden easily.



It was around this time I finally did some research on how to create fabric roses from the gold satin I had bought, and much to my displeasure, it turned out to be much harder than I expected. Cutting my losses, I was given the opportunity to go and collect some fabric flowers from a nearby shop that remained open despite the lockdown. I wanted golden roses, but found some small red foam roses perfect to be stitched onto dresses. Still wanting some aspect of gold, I decided to also purchase some gold glitter paint, and painted all 48 mini roses that I bought. The effect of normal flowers with the shimmer of gold only enhanced the fantasy fairytale design I had priorly created.



Of course, before I sewed the bodice to the skirt I had to try it on one more time to make sure it all worked. By stuffing the top of the skirt into the bodice and awkwardly lacing it all together, I was able to get a good impression of how it would turn out post sewing. Taking the opportunity to do a small photoshoot, I tried to draw on my future plans.



At this point, my plans were to have the roses about an inch apart along the collar and waistline, with short sleeves attached to the side of the dress, though not much detail is in this crude drawing.

With much maneuvering of mountains of fabric, I managed to sew together the bodice and skirt. However, after doing so, I saw the line was uneven and wonky. I knew there was no way to reverse the stitches without leaving damage, so I gathered up some scrap tulle fabric, sewing it into a long strip to become a belt. It covered the messy stitches perfectly, making a clean transition between bodice and skirt. At first I was going to try and use a button or velcro to seal it in the back, but on further inspection I realised I could use eyelets to tie it in with the corset back. Putting the eyelets into tulle was harder, but eventually it all connected together in a clean simple way.



(This photo makes me insanely happy, for some reason)

The next step was one I slightly dreaded; sleeves. I wasn't sure how they were going to work, or if I really had any plan for them, but I began by getting two squares of tulle and making a pocket for a thin piece of elastic to go through. This took time and patience, and I almost ripped the fabric a few times, but with the help of a safety pin I managed to edge it all the way through. Sewing the two ends together on both sleeves, it left a nice gap for freedom of arm movement and ventilation. However, unlike my prior plans, I liked the flowy sleeves more than if I were to try and make puffy ones. I also considered attaching them to the dress themselves, but soon realised it would inhibit my movement immensely, preventing me from raising my arms and potentially damaging the dress itself. So, though this might change in the future, I decided to leave them as tubes of tulle.



(It looks a little pathetic like this, but it looks way better on a person.)

At the current point I was at, I knew this was the time to try on the bodice, skirt, belt and sleeves all together for the first time. With a little struggling and a set of mirrors, I was able to do up the corset and belt, and easily slide the sleeves onto my arms where the elastic held them up with no effort. Dressing it up with some extra jewellery and some lighting, I took a small photoshoot of where I was at this point. Through this, though, I realised that I would need to round out the boning, or add extra padding as the ends were digging into my skin everytime I didn't stand up straight.



(Ignore the fact that I cannot pose comfortably)

The day after the mini photoshoot, I checked over the dress to make sure no damage came to it while wearing it. I sewed some layers of neutral material over the ends of the boning in an attempt to stop its poking, but I won't know if it worked until I next tried the dress on for a period of time. I then did some maintenance on the dress by evening out the bottom of the skirt and the sleeves, making sure everything was neater. I decided to not add a hem to the bottom of the dress, in fear that it would take away from the soft flowiness that the dress faded out into. And then, because I apparently consider myself a comedian, I took a photo of myself with "Manakin Skywalker" like an old prom photo (included below for reference).



(Stephanie and Manakin, Prom 1986)

Another thing I noticed while doing the mini photoshoot was that the skirt was more see-through than anticipated further up the leg. I was wearing shorts while photographing, but in an actual outing situation, the skirt itself wouldn't be appropriate. So using what was left of the neutral material, I made a simple skirt with the same techniques I learnt in junior textiles. By using an elastic, it also helps shape the silhouette of the dress, an important factor as I wished to accentuate a slight hourglass figure. The circumference was also large enough to not inhibit movement in any way, and the neutral colour means that its presence is hard to see to the unknowing eye.



(Left: Underskirt with tulle on top, Right: The underskirt revealed)

So I toyed with several different flower amounts, trying options like completely bunched together in a zig-zag formation, separated by an inch, and where to stop or whether to go onto the sleeves or not. But after consideration and testing, I ended up sewing the flowers on the front only, as well as a triage on the sash. Perhaps, one day, I'll sew on more, but I felt the right amount (at least at the moment) was just the 11 or so on the front.



(Pinned attempt of back, but it made it harder to do up and move around in)



(Sash design)



(Finished sewn on roses - look at the glitter!)

So with the flowers sewn on I have completely finished the product to my satisfaction at this point. In a month or two I'll probably retry and shuffle some things, perhaps change the flowy sleeves or add on more flowers or exchange the underskirt. But at this point, I'm happy with how my lockdown dream came out. And of course, I took as many photos as possible in front of my bookcases (cause I love to read and they are a fantasy lands so I figured it was suitable)













A Final Message (or maybe an overall reflection); Probably a bit of both

This dress is not perfect.

There are many things within the dress that I wish I had had the forethought to change, or to redo to make it better.

But I cannot change the outcome as of this moment.

The dress is not perfect.

But neither is lockdown.

Neither is any dream.

And neither am I.

This dress made me feel like a princess of a far away land and I will cherish the lessons and skills I have gained through its creation.

I can only say that I hope others will also create something that brings them so much joy and happiness in a world that is not perfect, and in a time where real life doesn't seem realistic.

A Lockdown Dream

By Stephanie McArthur

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