

A Sustainable Approach to Historical Costuming: Frugality, Digitization & Applied Learning

Emily Bailey: Dept. of Theatre, Dance, & Arts Management

Advisor: Jay Pecora, Chair: Dept. of Theatre, Dance & Arts Management

SUNY Potsdam Presidential Scholars Program, Kilmer Undergraduate Research Program

This project was an advanced, long-term study of a concentrated period of fashion history intending to provide opportunity for independent instruction through the production of full garments, utilizing primary sources of the period (focus placed on c.1902-1907) and placing emphasis on purchasing sustainably from small businesses and secondhand establishments. Resources were favored that support a narrative of environmental & and practical sustainability, with resulting products intending to foster individual learning and personal//professional development.

From 2D Patterns → 3D Bodies

The process of creating the garments featured in this project allowed firsthand experience to be gained in blending critical thinking, mathematics, and visual engineering into one art form to produce garments that not only fit the desired look of the period, but also fit the body. Problem-solving skills abounded through this experience when adjustments were needed to accommodate variations in body shape or fabric behavior, requiring adaptability and ingenuity to produce a garment that was functional, visually appealing and historically accurate.

Slow Craft & Heritage Skill

The nature of this project also lends itself to the appreciation of slow craftsmanship, offering a stark contrast to the instant gratification prevalent in many aspects of modern life. Its importance lies not just in the production of garments, but in the process itself - wherein hours, weeks, and days can be devoted to the creation of a single piece of clothing. The effect of putting this heritage craft to practice in the modern world fosters a deep connection between creator and creation, comparing the craftsmanship and patience of the past with the hurried gratification of the present.

Historic Preservation & Sustainability

A central goal of this project was focused on its method of textile consumption, where sourcing sewing supplies relied on items that were thrifted, donated to the project, or purchased from small-business establishments with a similar commitment to environmental sustainability and a central awareness of how their business practices can reduce textile waste, reducing contribution to climate destruction. Each garment involved in this project stands as a gesture of environmental stewardship, diverting textiles from landfills and reducing the demand for new resources.

