

Qué Bonita: A Remarkable Story of Family, Structure, and Love

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Abstract

Traditional bridal wear is often described as white dresses made for women to wear on the day they marry a man to become a wife. This description does not include the many different social identities and cultural variations that people inhabit. Today brides are not just looking for dresses or even white garments: today, people are looking for a special outfit to marry the person they love, whether that be a man or woman: they are looking for an outfit that will make them feel special and beautiful.

The collection is inspired by my grandmother, her love for her culture of Mexico, and her beliefs in the Catholic Church: creating my fascination with the insertion of the Catholic Church and Mexican culture. Plagued with colonization and destruction, a beautiful culture filled with vibrancy and joy was created, the Mexican Catholic Church. My story begins with my grandmother falling in love in Mexico, wearing none other than a white dress that changed her life. Once married, my grandparents moved to a farm in Northern California, where my grandfather planted a garden so vast it became a child's fantasy land and my grandmother's joy. There she raised her family and beloved canary birds, instilling the beliefs of the Catholic religion and stories of the Mexican culture.

Using practiced disruptive design techniques, I aim to transform the bridal industry into a space that's inclusive and empowering to both people and the environment, starting with the way we view ourselves and society's definition of beauty by drawing inspiration from culture. The collection was developed around the design philosophy of creating with the allure of drawing glamour and awe.

Through my inspiration and research from Mexico, the Catholic Church, my family heritage, and spectacle, this collection questions the importance of a dress and how to make people feel special. It will allow them to love themselves as they start a new chapter in their lives. As an esteemed bridal designer, Vera Wang, once said, "It's not just another dress, It's the dress you'll remember forever" (Wang, n.d.).

Proposal Summary

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said, “It’s not just another dress, It’s the dress you’ll remember forever” (Wang, n.d.).

Design Philosophy

I aim to design with the allure of glamor and awe. The collection is inspired by my life experience at the intersection of the Catholic Church and Mexican culture.

My ambition for the collection is to demonstrate that bridal design is an art form that speaks to the fantasy of fashion at the highest level of luxury and haute couture. This collection is very personal to me: I want to honor both my cultural background and the broader culture of Mexico by creating a collection that is not only a work of art but also creates a space of Latina representation in fashion that as a young girl I wished existed for me.

Objectives

Upon completion of the thesis project, I will have gained an understanding of:

- The importance of research
- My family history
- My design development process
- The process of trial and error within the design process
- How to write a thesis design report
- How to produce a collection of eight professionally made looks using bridal and haute couture techniques
- How to appreciate a culture without appropriating it
- How to tell a story through design about the beauty of family and culture

The Muses

Muse One: The Catholic Church

Romans 13:8: *Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.*

Love, peace, compassion, and reconciliation are a few of the values institutionalized by the Catholic Church. Infused with beliefs from the bible and tradition, the Catholic Church is one of the largest Christian denominations in the world and has an intense effect on the Western world-spanning ruling governments to architecture.

The Catholic religion is strictly hierarchically, structured with the Pope in Rome presiding over cardinals, who in turn preside over archbishops. Archbishops lead archdioceses which are split into parishes led by priests who interact directly with worshipers. The religion follows strict tradition-with only men allowed to enter the priesthood and women serving as nuns. The congregation of the Church has a goal of following and participating in the seven sacraments throughout their lives, one of which is matrimony.

During the Middle Ages, the papacy began to gain authority over the church. Missionaries worked to expand the faith beyond geographic boundaries. The largest, most dramatic, and most violent mission was the Crusades (Tyerman, 2005). Christian learning began to be incorporated within schools, with cathedral schools replacing monasteries which became universities (McKenzie, n.d.). By the 10th century, the institution of Catholicism had been planted, and the emergence of theology began (McKenzie, n.d.). Themes included the idea of God, humanity, the world, salvation, the divine, worship, and the study of the last times. Marked by decay and corruption, the 10th century marked a time of decadence for the Catholic Church, which became one of the wealthiest entities of the Middle Ages. By the 11th century, around the year 1000, many of the traditions still followed today had been established, including the sacraments. Life today for many Catholics is marked through the timeline of the sacraments (Evason, 2018). Although the church was built on what was believed to be good values, those opposing them were viewed as heretics and faced severe punishment, including death.

In the early 16th century, Mexico was conquered by the conquistadors, soldier-explorers of Spain,

and allied countries led by Hernán Cortés (Riding, 2016). Alongside illness and death, the conquistadors brought the traditions of the Catholic Church (Evason, 2018) to Mexico. During the fall of the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan, modern-day Mexico City, the now-enslaved Aztec people were forced to build churches for the Spanish. The first cathedral was built on top of El Templo Mayor, a temple in Tenochtitlan dedicated to Tlaloc, the Aztec god of rain, and Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec Sun and War God and God of Tenochtitlan (Kilroy & Zucker, 2017). This was one of the biggest sites for worship in the Aztec culture (Cohen-Aponte, 2021).



Figure 1. Front view of Mexico City Cathedral; Part of El Templo Mayor Ruins with from the back of the Cathedral

Due to the many similarities between the Catholic saints and the Mesoamerican gods, the conversion of people came fairly easy, especially because that the place of worship remained the same as seen in figure one. There are even folklore tales of underground tunnels connecting the Cathedral with one of the pyramids of the temple. (Cohen-

Aponte, 2021) This mix of religions was the start of the Mexican Catholic church. Although architects for many of these buildings were Spanish, the craftsmen were Indian, creating a new mestizo style combining architectural styles (Cohen-Aponte, 2021). These awe-inspiring spaces were the start of the inspiration for my collection.

Muse Two: My Mexican Heritage



Figure 2. My maternal grandmother in her beloved garden

My grandparents immigrated from the state of Jalisco in Mexico in 1960. They moved to Vacaville, California, a small farming town now best known as a pit stop on the way to the world-class ski destination of Lake Tahoe. They raised a family of ten on a ranch on Rogers Lane, a street that became formative in many of the lives of their children. Both of my grandparents worked in the apricot and peach orchards in the Northern California area near Fairfield. In addition to strictly following the beliefs of the Catholic Church, my grandmother was extremely superstitious. She infused fantasy to me at a young age through both the stories of the church and Mexican fairy tales. I was told never to get my palm read because God's plan was the only plan. To say the sign of the cross whenever passing a cemetery is a way to pray for those lives. To care for the flowers like one would care for people. The idea and sanctity of life heavily influenced culture and religion in much of Mexican culture and certainly in my family.

Upon moving from the ranch to their first home, my grandfather built my grandmother a garden (figure 2); it was a child's fantasy land of cactus,

pomegranates, apples, oranges, kumquats, figs, and peaches. The garden wrapped around the small one-story family home and my grandmother was always found somewhere hidden among the flowers and the fruits with her second children—her canaries. The birdcage sat in the center of the garden, next to two chairs under the apple tree and a large cross. As a little girl, I'd sit there with my grandmother in between playing hide and seek, scared to touch the cactus plant around the corner. She was the head of a strong matriarchy, followed by my mom, aunts, and older cousins, that shaped my family and the culture of my childhood.

Although my Spanish was never strong, I felt like we had our own language. I always understood what she said, “Mi Bonita.”

Although we never fully celebrated the Day of Dead or Dia de Los Muertos, we followed many of the beliefs attached to the holiday. The holiday was a blend of Mesoamerican, European, and Spanish cultures (Editors, 2018). The tradition spawned from ‘All Souls Day’ a pagan celebration that the Roman Catholic Church adopted in Mexico as a way to blend cultures. Medieval Spain celebrated all Souls Day, bringing wine and pan de animas to the graves of loved ones in addition to flowers and candles (Editors, 2018). Conquistadores carried these traditions with them, aligning them with similar beliefs of ancient Mexican cultures. There are debates as to whether the holiday was endorsed by the Church to aid in the blending of culture or was celebrated by the Mexican people as a way to regain their cultural roots, separating away from the church. The Aztec and Nahua people of ancient Mexico believed in a cyclical view of the universe and saw death as an integral, ever-present part of life. My grandmother had a similar belief of life and death, although the holiday did not become popular in Western American Culture until recently. Children’s films such as Disney’s *Coco* and 20th Century Films *The Book of Life* explore the holiday and its importance in Mexican culture.

Muse Three: My Family Heritage



Figure 3. My baptism, the first Holy Sacrament of the Catholic Church (From left to right: dad, maternal grandmother, my paternal uncle and godfather, my maternal aunt and godmother, mom, me, paternal great uncle and priest, maternal grandfather, and paternal grandmother)

As a predominantly Mexican-Catholic family, we attended mass every Sunday with my family and spent hours gazing into the beauty of the stained glass windows and never-ending columns. My knees would hurt from kneeling while viewing at the elaborate altars filled with candles and flowers.

We said grace at dinner. Attended events at our Church. Celebrated every religious holiday. The Catholic religion became a fundamental pillar of my childhood, bringing together both sides of my family as seen in figure three.

Drawing upon this background, my collection will highlight an intersection of culture, beauty, and representation. I plan to incorporate different aspects of hand and design work inspired by my Mexican Catholic heritage into my collection.

The Power of a Dress

The importance of a dress or piece of clothing can change one’s perspective, it can encourage importance and confidence. It can become a part of one’s family history. Designers hold power to break down barriers by creating a lens through which others can see the world. As someone who strives to make others feel seen and special, I intend to create a lens to improve humanity by disrupting design within the bridal industry. Through this change, we as designers have the power to make people of all identities feel

important and confident in themselves, similar to the way my grandmother felt when putting on her white dress.

After joining the Mexican Military Services with his brother to support their family, my grandfather traveled throughout Mexico. In 1953, while still in the military, he traveled to Sayula, Jalisco, a larger town in the area hosting a festival.

My grandmother, after enduring a dark childhood with the loss of her mother and an abusive father, spent most of her time with her maternal grandmother. My great-great-grandmother spent much of her time sewing and helping prepare for their town's festival in Sayula. For the festival, she made my grandmother a white dress with embroidery all along the edges and insisted she attend the event. My grandmother refused. Being twenty-five years old at the time in 1953, she felt out of place and like an 'old maid'.

After some persuasion, my grandmother put on this special white long-sleeved mid-length dress and attended the festival with her girlfriends. Although she wanted nothing to do with strangers, that day, she met a traveling soldier, my grandfather, as pictured in figure four.



Figure 4. My grandparents upon meeting

The Creative Process Continuum

Eureka Moment

"We are Catholic. It's a sin. She wouldn't, never ever." ~Silvia Moreno-Garcia, *Mexican Gothic*, 152

Although I grew up in a very religious household, I often struggled with religion. My sister and I both attended a Jesuit high school, where many of the same values from my church-going childhood were reinforced upon us. We followed religion/religious classes and participated in weekly mass; I even had to partake in a week-long silent religious retreat. The retreat is one of the biggest secrets amongst the student body of my high school and is known as Kairos. Almost the entire senior class goes on this retreat in different groups throughout the year, keeping the secret that it is a silent retreat. Once the retreat is over, you are sworn to keep the secrets of the retreat a secret for the next group to experience the 'magic', as some might call it, of the trip.

On coming to college, I abandoned much of my faith. Despite my high school, experience, as I got older, the strictness or imposition of belief began to fade. During my senior year of high school, my mom got sick, which pushed both my parents back towards the church, while my sister and I became more distant from it. The more important events of dance practice and school work overtook family dinners and attendance at mass. While the ideals and values of the religion lingered, many of the acts were long gone.

Sitting around in my family home during the pandemic, I was reminded of many of these small religious moments. The baptisms, the confirmations, the enormous family brunch that occurred post mass. I re-discovered the many religious relics that remain in my family home—crosses, photos from various religious occasions, the rosary, and even the statue of Mother Mary in our garden all served as reminders of religion.

During this time at home, I picked up the novel

Mexican Gothic by Mexican-Canadian author Silvia Moreno Garcia. The story centers around a twenty-something girl growing up in a wealthy religious family in Mexico. She fears her cousin's life is in danger within her new marriage, taking the story to a small mining town in Mexico. The family did not believe in fantasy, but in faith. With vivid imaginative illustrations, the imagery all felt too similar. The yellow canaries singing in the gardens, the crosses on the wall, the figurines of saints, and the love of family all reminded me of my family and my cultural history.

The story is set in the 1950s, a time when many questioned race, ethics, morals, and religion, similar to the time of 2020. As someone of mixed race, I never really felt part of one race or culture more than another. My family followed many practices of the Mexican, Chinese, and Portuguese cultures. I know the languages, the foods, the countries, the special holidays. Yet, I would not necessarily identify with any or one specific culture. The one main connector between my family culture is the Catholic religion.

Upon arriving back at school, I decided to take a Latin American Art history class, where I fell in love with the history of Mexican culture. I saw so many connections between ancient Mexico and my life as a Mexican American. All of the imagery from the class and my childhood background came together to inform this larger picture of what my collection was to be.

Religion, race, art, culture, family, belief. I became so curious about what it all meant, what it all had to do with me. What was my family history, how does that intertwine with these beliefs, and where was the beauty in all of it? That is what my collection focuses on— finding the beauty in this long history of culture, art, and religion.

Breaking Down the Problem

Part 1: History Of Bridal Design

After working for various fashion companies, it

became clear to me that there was a gap specifically in the bridal market. What is Bridal Design? Is it fashion designed for reality, based on fast fashion in the sense that those designs are being fit as a means to an end and mass-produced? Or is bridal design an art form that speaks to the fantasy of fashion design at the highest level of luxury and haute couture?

This collection questions where bridal design falls in the intersection of fast fashion and haute couture. The collection response will focus on the art and detail of bridal wear, with the goal of pushing the boundaries of “traditional” bridal wear. Incorporating wovens to create a remarkable ensemble, this collection will prove that bridal wear is an art form and worthy of fashion's critical taste.

Bridal wear, for too long, has been pushed aside by the fashion industry when it was once the pinnacle point of a fashion collection. Bridal wear often ended each runway show with the most dramatic moment, speaking to the connection between fashion and haute couture (Wischhover, 2014). “A moment of fantasy”, as Carmela Spinelli, the chair of SCAD's fashion department described in an interview with writer Cheryl Wischhover for *Fashionista*.

Fashion needs that moment again; it needs the allure of glamour and awe. In this post-pandemic world, people are craving glamour and the need to dress up (Maguire & Binkley, 2021).

As the end of the pandemic allows for more events to occur, brides are being introduced to a new era of what a wedding is. Many have had to downscale or cancel their original plans over the last few years, leaving the idea of extravagance out (Kambhampaty, 2022). With over a year of Zoom events and ceremonies, bridal wear has changed with the times. My bride is one who is aware of the cultural and sustainable implications of our new world. However, my bride is a person who wants a ‘fashion moment’ after succumbing to many of the pandemic trends. The pandemic changed the whole process of bridal wear starting with how

to shop for a bridal dress. This familial, special moment was taken from a lot of brides who had to choose their closest one to two people to shop with or were forced to pick a gown virtually via a zoom appointment. Many forwent even buying a dress starting separate trends of pantsuits, minidresses, or bridal separates. Looking toward the future, I aim in this collection to bring those moments of glamor back while still adhering to the trends of the current time. For years, the most esteemed fashion houses closed their runway shows with wedding gowns including Chanel, Guo Pei, Jean-Paul Gaultier, and many more as seen in figure five. However, in the last few years, fashion has discarded this tradition of the “last bride”, either not showing a white gown at the end of the show or doing a completely separate show for bridal. Separating the two -- couture and bridal-- has created a gap and allowed the bridal design to fall out of fashion and into mass retailers. It is no longer necessary to create a ‘fashion moment’ as it was when bridal was included and recognized by the fashion industry as fashion. Brides today might buy a wedding gown from a catalog or online just as they would fast fashion. My goal is to bridge the gap of bridal within the fashion industry while finding beauty within my cultural background and history.

Part 2: What makes a fashion collection ‘remarkable’

Remarkable, is defined by the Oxford dictionary as worthy of attention. For years fashion designers have created ‘remarkable’ collections. For example, Alessandro Michele’s Spring/Summer 2019 collection for Gucci created both fashion and music history within the show with a performance by Jane Birkin. Kerby Jean-Raymond’s Spring/Summer 2020 collection for Pyer Moss intertwined gospel, hip-hop, blues, and fashion. John Galliano’s spring/summer 1998 extravaganza collection for Dior did so. All of them included at least these five aspects that I have defined as making a remarkable collection:

1. **Fit:** Fit plays an incredibly important role in a collection. Even oversize pieces have an aspect of fit. This is where scale comes into play, does

a skirt overpower the bodice? Does the bodice overpower the skirt? Is it tight around the bust? Maybe the garment is tight around the waist? Or maybe the garment is not tight at all? How does it interact with a model? Can he/she/they move in the garment?

2. **Mystery:** How does the body play with the sense of mystery and wonder embedded in the garment? Are the eyes saying something behind a veil or headpiece? Are there any aspects of delicacy that keep an audience on their toes? How does material usage aid in the aspects of mystery?
3. **Emotion:** A collection should evoke some sort of emotion; what should the audience be feeling upon watching the collection? Is the collection conveying a story? In this case, is it one of family and cultural heritage? How should the model feel while wearing the garment? Is it a happy emotion? Stoic? Does the audience feel affected? How does texture play into this? How does the concept convey this?
4. **Fun:** Does the audience want to see more? Is it exciting? Are the shapes new or done differently?
5. **Cohesion:** Is there a sense of flow? Does it make sense with the concept? Is there a clear connection? If not, was that done purposely?

Conceptualize Design Ideas

Using all of my research and inspiration boards, I began my design process by sketching on a dress form as seen in figure six. This allowed me to conceptualize the front, side, and back of each look. I went through hundreds of sketches picking the top fifty, then the top twenty, then the top ten. I continuously edited drawings moving from drawing on dress forms to free-hand sketching. I started with an initial line-up all done by hand on the printed dress forms.

I found myself continuously drawing pieces with textured shapes. These ideas were among the first I explored in my design process. The design, a



Figure 5. Jean-Paul Gaultier Fall 2017 Couture; Chanel Fall 2012 Couture; Christian Lacroix Fall/Winter 2009



Figure 6. Initial Sketches

column dress with a textured top and sleeves, with a large cape in the back that fanned around the shoulders and neck, played with both scale and texture. In my next design, I continued to play with texture. I again started with a simple column dress and then began draping. I originally played around with cowl necks draping in both muslin

and polyester silk. Due to a mistake of pinning, I landed on this interesting shape around the hips. The fabric moved with the body. I loved it. I tried recreating the shape in paper, muslin, and again with the silk. However, upon further analysis, the shape became more complicated to recreate and more difficult when I changed fabrics.

I moved back to working with cowl necks trying to recreate the aspects of movement and texture. I went back to designing a variety of cowl neck bodices. Cowl neck backs with boat neck fronts, front cowl necks with a back cowl neck and so on. I knew I wanted to design a suit in the collection and suddenly began playing with the idea of a cowl neck suit. I was curious on multiple levels about how to do this. The front needed structure to convey the shape of a suit and for the lapels, but the back needed drape for the cowl. I was intrigued. This design played with fit, scale, movement, and even texture. My initial pattern was simple—take the front and back of a jacket pattern, but replace the top back with a low draping cowl. Keeping all of the original darts of a jacket, I made the pattern in muslin. Then the problems arose. What material would speak to the whole design? Do the darts work? Is it fitting tightly enough around the waist to support the structure and drape?

I tackled each problem in a particular order. I started with the fit, as this would affect the darts. I played with cutting the fabric on the bias and added a yoke to support the cowl. Then I moved to the darts. This was a game of chess. Each new dart design affected the support of the cowl. I moved the original darts, to combine into a single bust dart and a fish eye dart. In the next rendition, I tried removing the bust dart completely to only have a fish eye dart. There continued to be slight fit problems around the curvature of the bust. I added the bust dart again, but this time curved the end of it so the dart would curve more around the bust. It worked. I then realized for the design and fit to fully work I could only have one front dart. I reworked the darts again for what felt like the fiftieth time. I kept the curvature of the bust dart but then shifted the bust dart to start closer to the waist to compensate for the excess caused by removing the fish eye dart. The final design contains an elongated front dart that fits perfectly around the chest and still supports the back. Due to this, the yoke's size and shapeshifted. The final yoke shape was a curved moon-like strip. This supported the cowl but allowed the jacket to cinch around the waist. I left the two back darts for a better fit around the hips.

This was the beginning of the draft of my final lineup. I included all of the exploration designs I had begun and developed other designs based on inspiration and how the collection was forming.

Initial Criticisms of Project

Analyzing my line-up I began hating the collection. Something felt like it was missing. I started disliking designs, finding them boring and not authentic to where I started. Discussing it with Erica Johns, Cornell's Fashion and Textile Librarian, the collection felt incohesive. One of my main goals was cohesion. I needed to go back to the drawing board. I needed to be reminded of the beauty, color, and design inspiration of the Mexican Catholic Church and my family heritage. I fell too far into the trends of bridal design, which was one of my goals to not do. I did not want to fall into the 'basic' bridal, I wanted this to be a fashion collection not a mass-market bridal collection for the basic bride.

Develop Ideas Further

I went back to my sketches and original ideas. I re-examined my inspiration slide decks. I began adding the accessories. I needed to see the full collection. This is when I began to cut ideas. I cut two of my original exploration ideas, building off them to create better designs. The original exploration did not feel like it fit with my original concepts, or with my collection's shift in direction.

I wanted the collection to focus on fit, movement, scale, and attention to detail to highlight the aspects of a strong collection—fit, mystery, emotion, fun, and cohesion. I finalized my collection to respond to each of these.



Figure 7. Final Lineup

5.1.7 Explain Ideations



Figure 8: Look One. After looking at so many aspects of the Catholic Church and Mexican Culture, the first thing I associate with the two is prayer. Inspired by the shapes of Catholic vestments and prayer shawls, I started creating shapes around the shoulders that prevented the shoulders from moving but allowed the arms to move specifically into a prayer position. I explored a few different shapes before deciding on the first rendition, a clean-cut top bodice.



Figure 9: Look Two. Straying from the traditional gown, I wanted to create a bridal suit inspired by the architecture of the cathedrals I looked at. After draping a suit jacket, it felt very stiff and masculine. I played around with the idea of a cowl neck back which posed a variety of problems. The front needed structure, but the back needed drape. It was the most difficult piece in the collection to make.



Figure 10: Look Three. In a lot of the inspiration I looked at, many of the saints, in particular Our Lady of Guadalupe, wore multiple layers often a jacket or shawl with a more fitted dress. This look is my interpretation of that with the fitted dress paired with an oversized jacket meant to wear off the shoulders. I noticed many of the images of Our Lady of Guadalupe were adorned with gold or rays of light. She was also often adorned in Milagro charms. I used Milagros, which are Mexican luck or protection charms, for embellishment on the dress. Each one was hand sewn on.



Figure 11: Look four. My grandmother's garden was filled with so many different fruits, vegetables, and flowers including marigolds. In Mexico, marigolds are used for a variety of things besides decoration. For the Day of the Dead holiday, marigold gold flowers are often found on ofrendas. It is said that the flower helps guide souls between the living and the dead. Looking at the flower I was inspired by the literal shape and created my own version. I played around with size, shape, and placement (reference Test Ideas in textiles/ material- swatches). I wanted the shape to feel natural and effortless, not prim and perfect like a Hallmark flower.



Figure 12: Look Five. I continued playing with the floral shapes but in a different fabric. The polyester mikado fabric created a fluffier shape than the silk did. I again played around with a few different shapes, exploring both literal floral shapes and more abstract shapes. I ended on a fuller floral shape for the final. I also played around with placement but liked the shape on the side. Although the waist is covered, the eye creates a waistline due to the cut of the dress.



Figure 13: Look Six. For the last look inspired by the marigold shape, I went back to using silk. The look is a mini skirt and crop top made of silk twill. This look broke up the collection in terms of length and scale. The silk charmeuse flower was attached to the right side of the chest with a strap on the left side. Similar to the silk flower in Look Four, but slightly different, this flower had strands of different lengths falling from it, some even longer than the length of the skirt. The veil paired with the look has a mix of floral shapes in white corded lace. The edge blusher is two roses facing each other, which is a symbol of mutual love and affection.



Figure 14: Look Seven. I call this dress the 'angel' dress because when the sleeves are puffed out correctly they mimic angel wings. With a corset and boning underneath, the sleeves are attached at the neckline until the underarm, where they then drape down and are attached at the back by the zipper. The skirt is a high-low skirt in the sense that it starts higher on the hip in the front and drops below the hips in the back, with more fullness in the front.



Figure 15: Look Eight. The last look in the collection honors the traditional bride with a large full skirt and empire waist. I choose not to do a dress with a waistline at the waist as it felt too ‘princess’ and ‘cupcake’ bride, which is what I wanted to stray from. Inspired by a 1745 oil painting, the Black Madonna Mexican painting also known as The Virgin of Guadalupe, the shape of the dress encapsulates the body. The empire waistline allows for fullness around the whole body and support around the chest, with a similar shape to the dress of the Madonna. A dress starting at the shoulders with the same fullness would not have had the same effect.

Style and Photography

The collection was presented at both the Cornell Fashion collection and within the Martha Van Rensselaer gallery space in the show “Behind the Collections: An Exhibit” open from May 1 to May 8, 2022.

Presentation One: Cornell Fashion Collective

Garments were styled with a variety of accessories including veils, earrings, and bracelets as seen in figure fifteen. Each girl’s hairstyle was inspired by different traditional styles of braids in Mexico with flowers incorporated into their looks. Their makeup was inspired by artist Frida Khalo, images

of Selma Hayek in the film *Frida*, along with other Mexican iconography.

Presentation Two: Behind the Collections An Exhibit

The display was inspired by a variety of museum theories for best practices for the display of cultural objects. Although the collection includes a few physical cultural objects, it was fully inspired by the culture and all of the objects within that culture. On the wall behind the work, the frames are set up in a salon-style of exhibiting work as seen in figure sixteen. The salon-style was established by The Royal Academies of Art in France and England in the late eighteenth century. These men held a monopoly on what ‘good’ art was. (Presutti, 2022)

The wall style that is behind everything represents the colonial roots that led the Catholic Church to be in Mexico which created this beautiful culture. The first Catholic Cathedral in Mexico was originally the site for El Templo Mayor, a place of worship for the Aztecs in Tenochtitlan, modern-day Mexico City (Cohen-Aponte, 2021). The site was dedicated to the gods Tlaloc, god of rain, and Huitzilopochtli, god of sun and war also known as the Turquoise prince (Cohen-Aponte, 2021). The

jewelry made for the collection was symbolic to many of the Aztec gods and goddesses. The tablespace that holds the jewelry is pushed against the wall to represent an altar of sorts again to honor the original culture. The flowers on that table and around the space shift the time period and are representative of marigolds that are used for Day of the Dead altars. This celebration is a blend of Mesoamerican, European, and Spanish cultures, exactly like the Mexican Catholic culture.



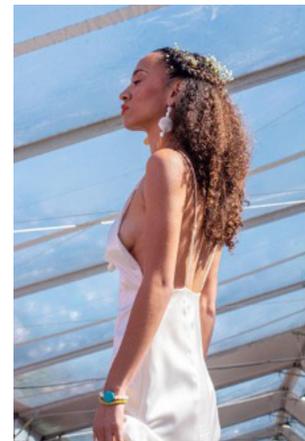
Look One



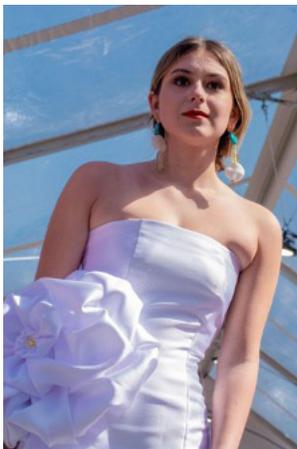
Look Two



Look Three



Look Four



Look Four



Look Five



Look Six



Look Seven

Figure 16. Images from the Cornell Fashion Collective Annual Show 2022



Left side of the Gallery



Close up of the Salon Wall



Part of the Wall Side

Figure 17. Photos of the Gallery

Conclusion

Through my collection I hope I was able to shine a light on a beautiful culture and tell my family's story, one that took me a long time to acknowledge and fully understand. There is still so much work that needs to be done with cultural representation in fashion, but I hope that this project was my start in creating my space of representation in the fashion industry. I hope that it was also the start of bridging fashion and bridal back together, creating moments of glamour and awe.

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Appendices

Seminar One: “Fragile Knowledge: Owning the Scars of Second-Generation Holocaust Survivors in Latin America” by Annette Levine, LACS Seminar Series” (February 14, 2022)

Identity can be a difficult concept. What does one do when their identity has to be hid or changed drastically? It was interesting to hear the family stories of second-generation Holocaust survivors who struggled with their identity after moving to a variety of Latin American countries. The talk discussed the dynamics of religion, identity, and family all topics similar to my work. The speaker brought up the concept of known vs not known vs kept a secret. I felt like this particular concept was very relatable as in any family there are things that are unknown and things that are secrets. Both are unknown but one is purposefully unknown. The talk also connected to my research of how culture and religion can be intertwined and sometimes difficult to do so. Many of the guests at the event talked about how they struggled to fit in as Jewish in places that were predominantly not Jewish and even in the same towns with Nazis in hiding.

Seminar two: Beyond Waste | Keynote Speaker | Colonialism, Climate Change, Consumerism, and the Need for Collective Change with Aja Barber (Feb 24, 2022)

Aja Barber was so fascinating to listen to regarding her thoughts on climate change, consumerism, and collective change. However, I found most interesting her thoughts on colonialism. This relates directly to my research as the Catholic Church only got to Mexico due to colonialism and the conquistadores. In terms of sustainability, Barber discussed how so much excess often ends in foreign countries that are home to predominantly black and brown people. Another example she discussed regarding fashion and colonialism was the role of India and the British. One of the many reasons England colonized India was to cut off trade routes of the numerous fashion products India was creating – cotton, silk, dyes, pigments, etc. The other aspect of her seminar that I felt was

very related to my project was the conversation on cultural appropriation vs appreciation. This was an aspect I myself struggled with, as someone who is Mexican how do I appreciate this culture within a collection without appropriating it. I really tried to show the beauty of a culture within the collection without overstepping. Lastly, she discussed how fashion can institute positive change for black and brown communities. I truly hoped that people looked at my collection and saw the beauty of Mexican culture and hope that any child of that culture can see themselves in my garments and within the fashion industry.

Seminar Three: Sustainable Systems for Fashion: Biomimicry and the Future of Fabrics by Tricia Langman (March 25, 2022)

Tricia Langmans discussed so much about sustainable systems for fashion within her talk, particularly about the future of fabrics. She reminded viewers of the importance of biomimicry and how we have to think sustainable. We are out of time to do otherwise. Thinking from the perspective of the Bridal industry, it's fascinating to me how sustainability will be further implicated. At the root of bridal fashion is the notion of people needing a dress or dresses for a single day or maybe a weekend. Then that dress gets preserved and possibly passed to the next generation or lands in waste. It's the exact opposite of sustainability. Therefore Langmans talk about the future of fabrics was particularly interesting to me. Can these bridal dresses and fabrics be reused for other things? The answer is yes, but that other thing has yet to be figured out.

Seminar Four: “Sandy Rodriguez Final Keynote Presentation” (April 28, 2022)

Sandy Rodriguez discussed her work with the Florentine Codex, a book I studied almost a year ago when learning about Mexican history and Mexican art history. The book inspired some of the original shapes I was creating, especially the flora and fauna. It was an incredible talk to hear as my project was wrapping up and came full circle from one of its original inspirations.

With a background in museums, she was also a great resource for discussing the placement of cultural objects within a space to both respect and acknowledge their origins.

Definitions

The modern trend of wearing white to one's wedding began in 1840 when Queen Victoria wed Prince Albert. Prior to this brides often wore their most expensive dress which was often of a dark color so that it would not dirty as easily as white would. The white trend has stayed fairly steady over the last century with few exceptions, one being the period of World War II. Due to fabric shortages, some brides resorted to creating gowns out of their future husband's parachutes (Yellin). However, in the United States, the American Association of Bridal Manufacturers lobbied against fabric shortages. They stated in 1943, "American boys are going off to war and what are they fighting for except the privilege of getting married in a traditional way? They're fighting for our way of life, and this is part of our way of life" (Schoeny).

I chose to stick mostly to the white color family including some bright whites, and ivories for the collection.



Figure 11. Color Inspiration: Queen Victoria's wedding dress

I had a difficult time choosing to just do white looks, as I felt that the Mexican Catholic culture is so colorful and full of life while white

symbolizes prosperity and virginity. White felt stiff in comparison to the fluid colors I felt were representative of Mexican culture. I choose to incorporate color through accessories and styling choices so I could incorporate my inspiration from the Mexican Catholic culture while still incorporating some aspects of traditional bridal wear.



Figure 12. Color Inspiration: photo of a table in Sayulita, MX and color inspiration



Figure 13. Use of colors in accessories



Figure 14. Colors in Jewelry

Color Story

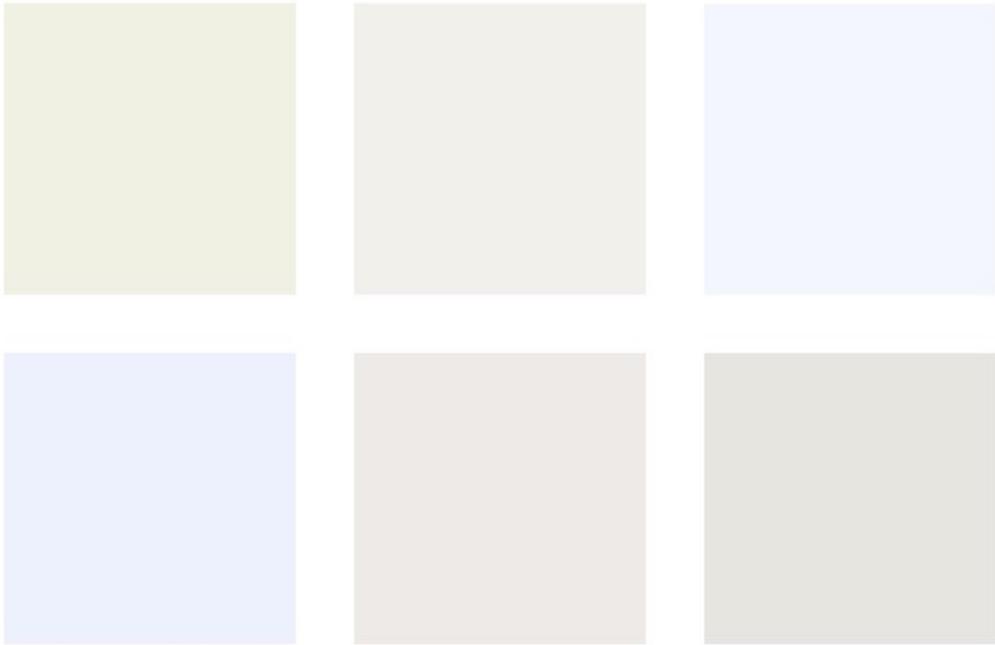


Chart 1. The color palette is inspired by traditional bridal wear, and the colors of Mexico and Cathedrals

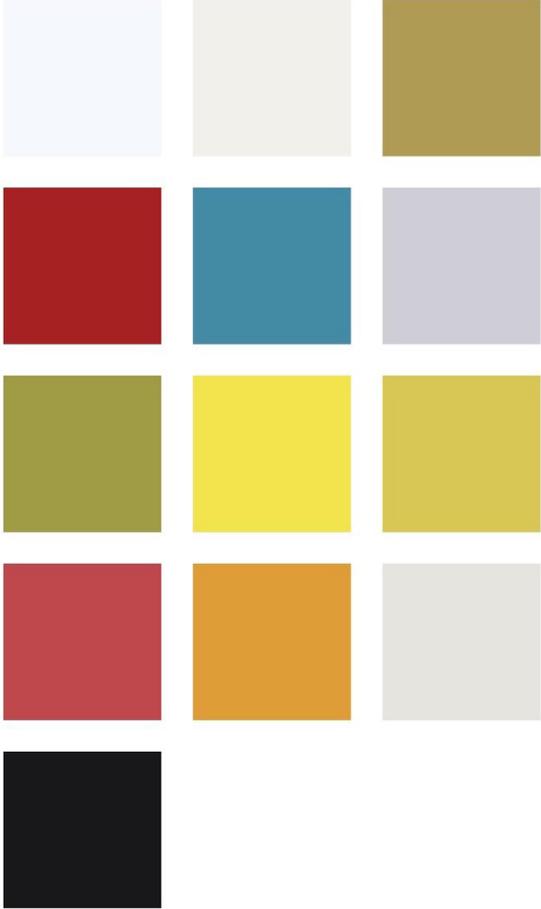


Chart 2. Pantone Colors for Accessories including veils and jewelry

Fabric Selection



Double Faced Polyester
Georgette

Mood Fabrics \$7 a yard
Gul Ahmed Fabrics INC \$6 a
yard



Polyester Silk Mikado
Exclusive Fabrics
\$10 a yard



Ivory Silk Charmeuse
Mood Fabrics \$37



White Silk Charmeuse
Mood Fabrics \$37



Ivory Silk Taffeta
Mood Fabrics
\$32 a yard



Silk Twill
Mood Fabrics
\$18 a yard



Ivory and Gold Floral Lace
Britex Fabrics
\$275 a yard



White Corded Lace
Britex Fabrics
\$55 a yard



Ivory Tulle
Britex Fabrics
\$3.49

Chart 3. Fabrics used in Final Collection



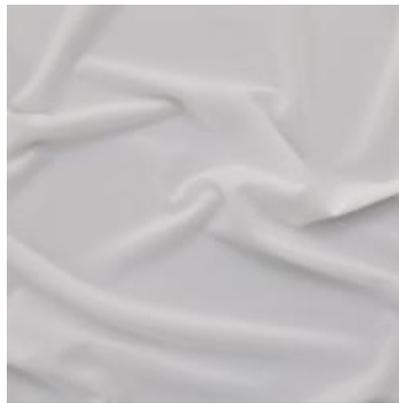
White Tulle
Britex Fabrics
\$3.49



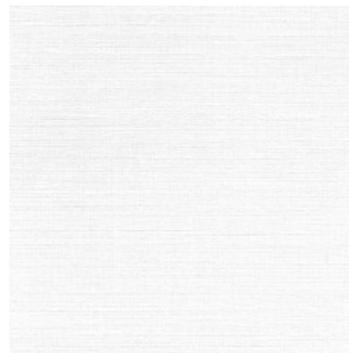
Soft Tulle
B& J Fabrics
\$33 a yard



Mesh
Spandex World
\$6 a yard



Silk Lining
New Star Fabrics INC \$13 a yard



White Linen
Joanns Fabrics
\$9.99 a yard

Chart 3. Continued

Accessories

Veils

Over the summer of 2021, I learned the couture techniques of veil making from both Cornell Alumna and Creative Director of Monvieve, Allison Miller, and the Creative Director of Sarah Nouri, Sarah Nouri. I used these skills and applied them in my collection and process of veil making.

The first veil I worked on is similar in length to a chapel veil at two and a half feet long and ~106 inches wide. I started by cutting the tulle. I knew I wanted this veil to be a mantilla veil so I cut the base wider than the top and eliminated the length for a blusher. Next was the lace. I spent months researching lace: where I wanted to get it, how I

would cut it, and most importantly how I would organize it. I did veil studies creating designs with paper before purchasing anything.

During winter break, I picked out three different laces in varied white tones. A bright white Chantilly lace, an ivory corded lace, and an ivory Chantilly lace corded with gold. I chose the latter for the mantilla veil. I carefully hand-cut each piece of lace and laid it out on the tulle playing with different designs. Once I finalized the design I liked, I hand pinned each piece of lace onto the cut tulle then hand stitched the lace.

The second veil I designed is similar in length to the first veil, however, it also includes a thirty-two-inch blusher. I used a white floral corded lace that outlined the edges of the tulle.



Figure 38. Veil Study



Figure 39. Veil One

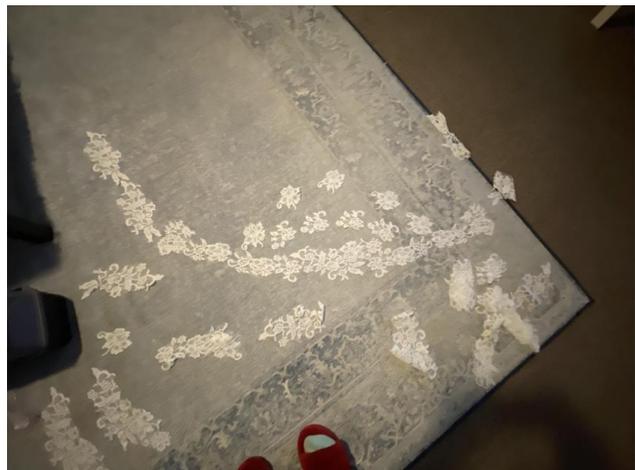


Figure 40. Veil Two



Figure 41. Veil Three behind Veil One for comparison

The third veil in the collection was the longest of them all. It was about five yards long, 110 inches wide at the front with a 34-inch blusher, and 120 inches wide at the end. It was made with an English tulle, so unlike the two veils with lace, it is thicker and less opaque in color.

Jewelry

The jewelry of the collection was inspired by a mix of Gods and Goddesses from Teotihuacan and from jewelry of the Catholic Church, particularly rosaries. I took the most inspiration from the supreme deity of Teotihuacan, the Great Goddess. Her statue was found near the pyramid of the moon and a print of the Goddess was rediscovered in 1890. She was associated with water, caves, and fertility. She later became a symbol of national identity and pride. Images of the Goddess were found all over in different forms— stone statues, paintings, carvings, drawings, etc. The Goddess

was distinguished by a few different traits, including her cleft head, which was a reference to the mountains; the symmetry of her body and

face; and her headdress. However most notable were her ear spoons, almond-shaped eyes, and arms decorated with bracelets. (Cohen-Aponte)



Figure 42. Great Goddess Statue



Figure 43. Great Goddess Print



Figure 44. Jewelry Process three



Figure 45. Jewelry Process Two

The circular shapes of the beads I chose was inspired by the Great Goddess ear spoons. I played around with symmetry making many of the earrings asymmetrical in both shape and length.

The bracelets were both inspired by the Great Goddess and the rosary.



Figure 46. Example of Jewelry on



Figure 47. Sample of bracelets