

CREATIVE TRANSFORMATION OF THE LAYERS OF ALAMANCE

By

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To my daughter Sara Elizabeth Schreck

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Abstract of Project in Lieu of Thesis
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CREATIVE TRANSFORMATION OF THE LAYERS OF ALAMANCE

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Self-identity is a personal awareness of oneself as a separate individual. Self-identity is a multidimensional concept that relates to personal characteristics such as one's role in a family or cultural group. The environment in which people live plays an important role in shaping sense of self. Self-identity is altered throughout one's lifetime by influences like relocation and changes in personal status and religion. Knowledge of personal heritage is also a major feature of self-identity.

In a mobile society, personal knowledge of family, place, and heritage becomes disconnected. This sense of disconnection is not unique but occurs because individuals seek independence by removing themselves from home to seek the place they think they belong. Contributing to the result of disconnection is the loss of memories over time. Acute events can change perception of history, and reliance on storytelling can lead to inaccuracy.

Developing an accurate family history occurs best when multiple sources of information are examined in the context of the location of home. This method helps create an enhanced physical and psychological exactness that defines and creates the connection between our home and history.

Through my research I was able to develop a clearer understanding of the historical events, industries and culture that contributed to my mother's identity and to my self-identity. My creative journey provided an opportunity to unravel portions of my family history. As I grew older, my sense of home became critically important to me. My mother passed away at 50 years of age from cancer. I was 20 years old when she died. The loss of my mother created a disconnection to my family and contributed to a change in the continuum of

my self-identification. As a result of my mother's death, my ability to impart family history later for my daughter was impaired. This project facilitated a reconnection to my family history, enabling my daughter to begin to know her grandmother and her own cultural heritage. The magnitude of my mother's loss deepened for me as my daughter grew into adulthood and she lacked an ancestral identity beyond her immediate family. To initiate a process of connection between my daughter and myself, my own self-identity required development. I realized that I lacked personal knowledge of my family history as a result of family loss, disjointed facts and lack of collected information.

Creative Transformation of the Layers of Alamance visually defines the layers of my family's heritage discovered by traveling along a route that used observational data collection in Ellis Island, New York; Dublin, Ireland; and Burlington, North Carolina. Text, images, drawings, video and family keepsakes were transformed by design into visual objects, to help define tangible components of my family history that could be viewed by others with transparency and reference. The specific outcome of this project was the development of a gallery exhibition of my journey involving research into the identification of family history.



Figure 1. *Irene's Dress*, front, from gallery exhibition



Figure 2. *Irene's Dress*, back, from gallery exhibition

Space defines landscape,
where space combined with
memory defines place.

—Lucy Lippard

INTRODUCTION

Self-identity is a personal awareness of oneself as a separate individual. It is a multidimensional concept, which means that it relates to a number of characteristics, such as one's role—like being female, a mother, or a member of a community group. The culture in which people are raised and/or live plays an important role in shaping sense of self as do the influences of family relationships, support and loss (Weigert & Hastings, 1171-1185). Self-identity is how people separate themselves from others. And, while self-identity changes along a continuum (caused by moving, marriage, influences of religion, etc.), intimate knowledge of one's heritage is a predominant feature of self-identity (Ryder et al., 49-65). Connection to place or one's home is a cornerstone for self-identification.

Lucy Lippard writes in *Lure of the Local*, This book is concerned not with the history of nature and the landscape but with the historical narrative as it is written in the landscape or place by the people who live or lived there. The intersections of nature, culture, history, and ideology form the ground on which we stand—our land, our place, the local. The lure of the local is the pull of place that operates on each of us, exposing our politics and our spiritual legacies. It is the geographical component of the psychological need to belong somewhere, one antidote to a prevailing alienation. The lure of the local is the undertone to modern life that connects it to the past we know so little and the future we are aimlessly concocting. It is not universal (nothing is) and its character and affect differ greatly over time from person to person and from community to community. For some people the lure of the local is neither felt nor acknowledged; for some it is an unattainable dream; for others it is a bittersweet reality, at once comforting and constricting; for others it is only partial reality, partial dream. These days the notion of the local is attractive to many who have never really experienced it, who may or may not be willing to take the responsibility and study the local knowledge that distinguishes every place from every other place.

Inherent in the local is the concept of place—a portion of land/town/cityscape seen from the inside, the resonance of a specific location that is known and familiar. Most often place applies to our own “local”—entwined with personal memory, known or unknown histories, marks made in the land that provoke and evoke. Place is latitudinal and longitudinal within the map of a person's life. It is temporal and spacial, personal and political. A layered location replete with human histories



Figure 3. Irene Sykes, age 3

and memories, place has width as well as depth. It is about connections, what surrounds it, what formed it, what happened there, what will happen there. (7)

The emotional and/or psychological reactions of an individual to events can create a memory of the past that makes it difficult for us to know the true story of history. For some of us, the history of events is found by reading recorded documentation of events, by studying the locals of a home town or community, or by discovering knowledge of their personal histories and maps of their lives via ethnographic or observational research. Locations and their histories can become complex because of the variables that influence the perception of place.



Figure 4. Myself, age 2

History is a narrative not having a beginning or end. Unwritten history is a labyrinth, a jumble of incidents without the silver thread of augmentation or exposition. It is like the beads of a rosary, unconnected, disjointed, broken. Written history is fossilized life, a latent energy—stored strength for new endeavor. Prosperous wise and happy are that people who have a noble history and read it. (Stockard 9).

This project was best investigated through analysis of place by traveling to particular locations to observe and record the visual signs of history within that culture. Materials from each location were later transformed into the final project. A more realistic meaning was formed when I was able to gather information within the context of each culture. The premature death of my mother contributed to some loss of my self-identity. Discovering details about my family history and creating a visual installation provided a concrete means to transform details and memories of my family into a tangible and powerful reflection of self-identity. Ultimately, my self-awareness allowed me to impart the historical information to the primary audience, which was my daughter and immediate family; then to the secondary audience of the local community.

PERSONAL SIGNIFICANCE

My mother, Irene Sykes (Figure 3) and I (Figure 4) were born in Alamance County, North Carolina. Her parents and grandparents were also born there. Both portraits were taken at locations about 3 miles from

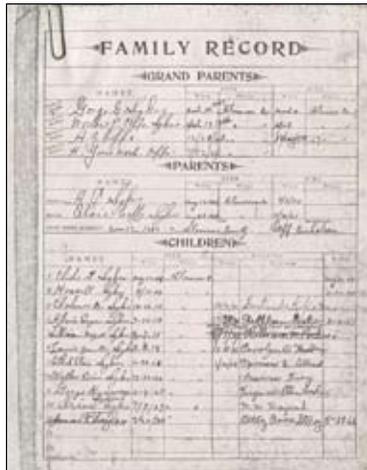


Figure 5. Birth records



Figure 6. Irene Sykes

each other in Alamance county. My mother was born on July 7, 1927. Her family of Scotch-Irish and English descent immigrated to Alamance County several generations earlier. Birth records exist of her maternal and fraternal grandparents' births during the mid 1840s in Alamance County (Figure 5). My mother was born the eighth child in a family of nine surviving children. Her portrait reveals a lively spirited young woman (Figure 6).

My mother was married to my father, Milan Michael Kraycirik, for 25 years until she passed away at 50 years of age from cancer. I was 20 years old when she died and she left 4 other daughters in her passing.

The death of my mother created a disconnection to my family and contributed to a change in the continuum of my self-identification. I was attending college in another state when she died and I lost connection with my hometown and immediate family. The loss of my mother, and my father very shortly thereafter, disrupted my family relationships. As a result of my mother's death, my ability to impart family history later for my daughter Sara was impaired. The disconnection created by her loss affected consistent trips home for family reunions and other family events. After my mother died, organization of these events and motivation to attend them waned. This project facilitated a reconnection to my family history, enabling my daughter to begin to know her grandmother and her own cultural heritage.

As my daughter grew into adulthood, I realized she lacked an ancestral identity beyond her immediate family. In order to initiate a process of connection between my daughter, myself and my mother, my own self-identity required development.

My mother's family's business, Sykes Foundry, was one of the early businesses supporting local industries by producing metal machinery parts. As the local industry transitioned from railroad to textiles, her family's business was able to maintain its identity by also supporting the textile industry. It exists today as Sykes Supply Company.

The community of Burlington, N.C., was established and officially named in 1887 and was built along the railroad in the mid 1850s. The prosperity of Burlington became directly related to the early activity of the cotton mills.

Local women and children first began moving into the work force from a previously agricultural society, during the early days of cotton weaving in Alamance County. The industry was well documented by sociologist and photographer Lewis Wickes Hine, whose work meant to invoke social reform of working conditions in American industries. He was hired to photograph for the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC) documenting working conditions of children in the workplace. His photographic work created momentum to pass legislation for reforming child labor laws in 1910, as well as visually preserving the culture of the weaving industry in North Carolina. (Hirsch 220-222)



Figure 7. My daughter Sara wearing the identity jacket



Figure 8. Sketch of memory drawing I

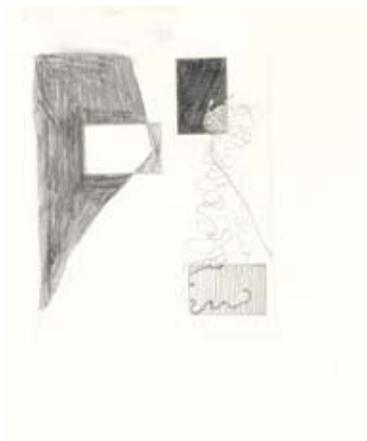


Figure 9. Sketch of memory drawing II

EARLY INFLUENCES ON THE EXHIBITION OUTCOME

Before graduate school, I had the opportunity to travel internationally. I visited Italy, France and Ireland. I noticed distinct cultural differences in each country and I became curious about my own cultural heritage. My research question was evolving. What could I learn about my own history, identity and cultural heritage? My first project in graduate school was related to merging identities of my father's and mother's family heritage. Floral motifs from a European embroidered keepsake and Scotch-Irish plaid patterns were merged together to create new patterns. Many different patterns were made and the most successful new pattern was chosen for use on the jacket.

This resulted in a new contemporary identity, stitched to the back of a denim jacket using leather and embroidery thread (Figure 7). This was meant to be a designed product that would be valued by my daughter as a sign of her heritage. The idea of identity and working with personal subject matter would later influence my project.

Another early project influential to the direction of this project was an assignment given in a sketchbook development course to create drawings from the memory of a dress. These are a visual representation of my mother's blue taffeta party dress, a cherished heirloom. The memory drawings are graphite on paper. I initiated the drawings and then gave them to my daughter Sara so she could add or subtract details within the drawings. We continued to alternate the drawings between the two of us, adding to the drawings to modify them over a period of a few days. The drawings were complete when both my daughter and I were satisfied with their content (Figures 8 and 9).

With this exercise I began thinking about my memories and attachment to this dress and realized my daughter did not really grasp the significance of this keepsake.

I began to use this dress as a source for creative iteration—sketches, drawings, photographs and video to explore the creative potential of the dress. These explorations allowed me to experiment with process, working with few rules or prescribed parameters. It gave me ample creative time to randomly work with little distraction. It yielded a series of images, representing several methods of creative processes that ultimately were used to help define some of



Figure 10. My mother's blue taffeta, dress (left), and the prototype of the final dress form (right).

the parameters of the final dress form. Figure 10 shows the inspirational blue taffeta dress and the prototype of the final dress form.

PURPOSE

The goal of my project was to develop an exhibition that incorporated a research-based methodology with a high level of craftsmanship and aesthetic appeal. I sought to transform elements from the researched information into a creatively designed final form while valuing a contemporary quality that would inform the target audiences and inspire other designers. The final outcome of this project was the development of a gallery exhibition, which documented and transformed my journey and observational research into a creative expression of family history.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I traveled to several locations to gather information and materials to contribute to the process of my creative work. A combined-modality approach was used to create this project comprising data and image collection as well as observational research, involving creative documentation in the form of several hundred photographs, a variety of sketching formats, videotapes and written text in the form of journaling. Several locations and museums were visited to gather valid sources of historical information. Personal keepsakes and artifacts as well as found materials such as fabric, local literature, maps, newspapers, signage, and advertisements were also collected, transformed and incorporated into the visual installation.

CREATIVE PROCESS

Information Gathering

During my travels, I was able to reconnect with my childhood, to my mother's family's business, to the cultural richness of Alamance County and to the historic textile industry of North Carolina, particularly by visiting Glencoe Mill Village, a historically preserved mill village well known for its production of woven plaid cotton fabric and the Alamance County historical museum which houses literature and artifacts about early Alamance County and its people. By traveling outside my home area to Ellis Island and Ireland, I hoped



Figure 11. Ellis Island exhibit showing immigration trends by year, location of departure and arrival.



Figure 12. Sculpture of Irish immigrant Annie Moore.

to gather information on immigration and the people who ultimately settled in Alamance County, N.C.

Time Line of Travel

• **December, 2008 Ellis Island, New York**

The visit to Ellis Island defined the immigration trends of my ancestors. Statistical and photographic exhibits provided insight on the points of departure and anticipated destinations of immigrants into the American landscape (Figure 11).

• **July, 2009 Dublin, Ireland**

On the visit to Dublin, I determined if my ancestors' path from Ireland to Ellis Island, New York, could be detailed further and if the history, patterns or techniques of the textile industry could be connected to those that existed in Burlington, North Carolina.

• **November, 2009 Burlington, North Carolina**

Burlington was visited to document family history and the textile industry to connect the information obtained in Ireland to Burlington and determine accuracy of information.

Locations Researched for Discovery

Ellis Island, New York

Historic Ellis Island provided a rich database that allowed me to observe exhibits, photographs and displays so I could better understand how my ancestors arrived in the United States. Looking at the exhibits and photography showed how the immigrants' facial features distinguished their geographical birth places and their clothing and belongings identified their cultural heritage. Photography exhibits and oral histories record the immigrants' journey(s) and their first impressions of their new home in America. These artifacts revealed their personal perceptions of hardship, such as displacement from their home(s) and their anticipation of new freedoms and experiences in America. One exhibit particularly important to me was the sculpture of Annie Moore. She was the first Irish immigrant processed through Ellis Island. Her clothing and bag were typical of the style of dress worn during that time period. A duplicate sculpture of Annie Moore exists in Cork, Ireland, the port from which she emigrated (Figure 12).



Figure 13. Photography exhibit at Ellis Island.

Another photography exhibit of a woman weaving was an example of women moving into the workforce and an example of their place in that industry (Figure 13).

Dublin, Ireland

Information on my family's heritage from Sally Walker Stockard's book "History of Alamance" suggested the early founders of the Alamance area in North Carolina were primarily of Scotch-Irish descent, with some English and German immigrants.

Sally Stockard writes, But those, who dared all things, whose courage was invincible, who, by their valiant hope and endeavor, gave us a name and a home, are too good to be forgotten. They came from Ireland, England, Scotland, Germany, by way of Pennsylvania in wagons to Alamance, a beautiful but wild country, inhabited not by Amalakites and Jebuzites, but by treacherous Indians. (6)



Figure 14. Existing signage in Ireland indicating Prosperous, a town which was originally built as a cotton weaving town.

Based on written history about immigration into Alamance County, and dates from family birth records, Ireland may well have my family's country of origin. I journeyed to Dublin, Ireland, to access information about the Sykes family. I visited Trinity College and was able to access the library archives to do a search of the Sykes name. From this search I determined that the origination of this name was probably the lowlands region of Scotland, however there was much integration between the two countries during that time period.

The National Museum of Ireland (in Dublin) had an informative exhibit curated by Mairead Reynolds: *Some Irish fashions and fabrics C1775-1928* included an interactive history display that chronicled the cotton, linen and woolen weaving industries in Ireland. Two books authored by Reynolds (keeper of the Art & Industrial Division in the National Museum of Ireland) detailed materials, methods, processes and skills similar to those used in the Alamance County mills. This exhibit included valuable literature and historical information about Irish fabrics and the textile industry worldwide.

I visited several fabric stores looking specifically for woven cotton and plaid patterned fabrics, which would be representative of the links between the textile industry in Ireland and the Alamance County weaving industry patterns. Finally, some of my research at The National Museum of Ireland indicated that there was a cotton mill town named Prosperous located in a rural area outside



Figure 15. A Glencoe mill village home awaits renovation.



Figure 16. Decaying mill structure in North Carolina.

of Dublin. One afternoon was spent trying to locate the town only to find that no historical artifacts or architectural structures existed. Only the history and the signage of the town of Prosperous remains (Figure 14).

Burlington, North Carolina

I was born and raised until the age of 18 in the city of Burlington, which is located in Alamance County. The prosperity of Burlington during the time I lived there was directly related to the early activities of the textile industry. Visiting my family and observing the local culture within this location was an important factor of this project because I could clarify details of history and cultural heritage in the context of the actual location.

A visit to Glencoe Mill Village was important for gathering information about the prominence of the early textile industry in North Carolina. Glencoe is a small rural community about three miles outside Burlington within Alamance County. From about 1880 to 1954, Glencoe was one of many mill villages typifying the early textile industry in the Piedmont region of North Carolina (including Alamance County). Its importance lies in the fact that it is one of a very few cotton weaving mill villages purchased and being renovated by the Preservation Society of North Carolina (Bradshaw, 2006) for the purposes of cultural preservation of this lifestyle and place. There is a growing initiative to preserve the history and artifacts of this industry (Figure 15). Its renovation allows the community access to its history. Discovering the origin of the mill industry was intriguing to me because I learned so much about my heritage. While visiting Glencoe I was informed about how the small community of Glencoe influenced Burlington and the mill industry later, during the time I lived there. My visit also helped me determine the relationship between the textile industry and the immigration of my ancestors. I observed and photographed many other decaying mill structures that could be preserved or renovation for reuse in the local area (Figure 16).

The tour of Alamance County Historical Museum yielded valuable texts written on the history of the area and provided actual textiles for hands-on inspection, including samples of the historically famous Alamance plaid fabrics and the artifacts made from this woven fabric.

Alamance County was similar to many rural towns in North Carolina combining agriculture, small business and textiles as a way of life for these small communities. Alamance plaid was a textile pattern that was significant to the



Figure 17. *Memory drawing I*, gallery exhibition



Figure 18. *Memory drawing II*, gallery exhibition

history of the area. Found in quilts, dresses and other fabric goods, Alamance plaid is an indigo blue and white, woven cotton material. It represents one of many well-known plaid patterns produced there and also represents the Scotch-Irish tradition of plaid patterns.

MATERIALS AND OUTCOMES

My project, visually defines the layers of my family's heritage discovered by traveling along a route that used observational data collection in Ellis Island, New York, Dublin, Ireland and Burlington, North Carolina. Text, images, drawings, video and family keepsakes were transformed into visual objects to create tangible components of my family history that could be viewed by others with transparency and reference.

Through my research, I was able to develop a clearer understanding of the historical events, industries and culture that contributed to my family history. My creative journey provided an opportunity to visually explore portions of this history.

Memory drawings I and II

Memory drawings I and II were framed and displayed in the exhibition to document the early creative process work that inspired the main conceptual focus of this project. They were framed in metal graphite frames to enhance the graphite medium used to create the drawings (Figures 17 and 18).



Figure 19. *Irene's Dress*, front



Figure 20. *Irene's Dress*, back

Irene's Dress

The final form of *Irene's dress* relates to the original inspiration of this project which was my mother's blue taffeta dress. It also relates to my history, as a young girl, as a dressmaker. I learned to sew dresses when I was in the seventh grade. The form was also influenced by the work of artist Leslie Dill, who also uses dress forms to communicate her messages.

The top pleats of the dress are constructed from 100% cotton Rives BFK artist paper. I used this paper because it is made of cotton fiber, connecting the dress materials to the early cotton weaving industry in Alamance County. Recycled French Speckleton paper was chosen for the underlying narrative sheets because it is a high quality, offset printing paper that graphic designers request for special projects in the design industry. Book binding tape was used for the straps of the dress to mimic the binding of a book. The belt and pleats were sewn together and metal grommets were used for fastening it all together. The materials chosen for the dress relate to book arts materials.

The dress was formed to read as a poetic narrative connecting three generations of women in my family. An initial prototype of the dress was made to determine structure and material function. Each pleat of the dress was measured, cut and modified. Pleat length and width were adjusted to determine how to form the skirt of the dress. The bodice of the dress has punched holes, which represent the glass beading on the original dress. The bottom edge of the hem was made with a deckle edge tool to look like handmade paper pages. After several modifications to the pleating and waistline of the prototype, the pleats were finally ready to be designed. Text and images were selected that were deemed most important from the research material, then scanned and collaged using Adobe® Photoshop. Adobe® InDesign was used to make the template for the pleat size and shape. The Photoshop collages were then placed in the InDesign template and printed individually through an inkjet printer. Underneath each top pleat was a second pleat layer that added narration about my thoughts and memories pertaining to the content of each photographic collage. The pleats around the form read like pages of a book, from left to right, so that the viewer could walk around the form of the dress in a counterclockwise manner and formulate the historical connection from generation to generation, pleat to pleat (Figures 19 and 20).



Figure 21. *Conversation with Sara*, video loop from gallery exhibition.

Conversation with Sara

The digital video loop, *Conversation with Sara*, documents our research visit at Glencoe Mill Village. This location symbolizes the history of the people who worked and lived in the area. My daughter accompanied me on this visit and we walked through the physical space. The conversation between my daughter and I on the videotape defines my daughter's understanding of our family history as well as her understanding of the artistic process and the importance of historical preservation of place and cultural heritage that we discovered during this project (Figure 21).

CONCLUSION

My project documents three generations of women in my family, reflecting the personal significance of the history of my family. Working through the process of this creative project gave me significant opportunities for learning. Learning through reading, observation, travel and discovery led me to continue on to a new method of working as a designer. By working in the mode of designer as author, I am responsible for the content of my projects as well as the creative form. Because I am responsible for the content, my personal voice and vision can be involved from the beginning stages of the project instead of just at the end of the process only to add style and aesthetic appeal as in traditional graphic design situations. By using design thinking methods, research and theory to strengthen design while choosing projects I have a personal interest in, I will become more invested in the outcome of future projects.

Self-authored graphic design is a dance between two central partners with varying degrees of differentiation: the designer as self and the content. The designer as self is recognition of the central presence of the designer as a voice and a vision in the process of form-creation and message-formulation. As an individual who balances emotional and expressive qualities with cognitive concerns, the designer's personal views and convictions are integral ingredients to the definition of self-authored graphic design. Having a point of view from the vantage point of self is crucial.

The content, the subject, the message—with which the designer must have a strong engagement—is the other central partner in this relationship. The designer's involvement with the content might come from personal experience, observation, research, collaboration, or an entrepreneurial venture. The designer often initiates the message through articulation of the content; this articulation could be in visual and/or verbal form. Having something to say in which the designer believes is also crucial. This allows the designer as author to maintain greater identification with the content; increased owner/authorship also comes with increased visibility and responsibility.

Working in digital media has given designers more occasion to blur the distinctions between written word and designed word. The realization that audiences and markets are not a unified mass, but made up of people with divergent interests and experiences helps account for the shift in approach to visual communication. Experiments involved with deconstruction of the text, and investigations of linguistic theory have provided designers with a bridge to a broader language. The desire to communicate with society seems to be at the center of the designer as author's rationale, especially in light of shifting personal/social space and communication patterns (McCarthy, 1).

During this project, I used my creative abilities to transform my research content into a visual communication that informed its designated audience. Transformation occurred on many levels: Transformation of my own sense of identity; transformation of the text and images gathered from research into the final forms of drawings, dress and video; and transformation of my daughter's knowledge of the history of our family. I believe transformation should be inherent in the creative process of design that it is the key to innovation in creative endeavors whether they are personal or entrepreneurial in nature.

Through my research, I was able to develop a clearer understanding of the historical events, industries and culture heritage that contributed to my mother's identity and to my self-identity, enabling me to pass that knowledge on to my daughter. My creative journey provided an opportunity to unravel portions of my family history that were previously unknown to me.

The intention of this project is to bring awareness to the importance of documenting and preserving personal history and cultural heritage. It is

also meant to emphasize the importance of place in our connection to home, identity and self-identity. This project influenced local residents, family and friends in the community of Burlington by bringing into focus the current preservation efforts to restore historic mill villages in the area.

The gallery exhibition influenced local graphic designers in Gainesville and on campus at the University of Florida by introducing them to the idea of working in the mode of designer as author, which encourages them to develop their own project content and direction and to discover innovative ways to work as designers.

FURTHER DIRECTIONS

Further directions with this project include an initiative on my part to exhibit the dress in Alamance County. I would like to create a series of narrative dresses that would involve similar research-information gathering techniques and creative process.

This new conceptual process of first determining relevant personal projects, using research to strengthen the depth of the subject matter and finally creatively transforming the information to uncover innovative solutions of design. My interests and attention are on developing works that are personally significant to my interests as an artist and designer and that have a positive impact on their intended audience.

As a graphic designer I intend for my work to impact my immediate community and targeted audiences in a way that implements new ways to use design. I anticipate bringing research and design thinking, transformation, and innovation to the projects I am involved with in the future.



Plate 1. *Irene's dress*, front, detail 1



Plate 2. *Irene's dress*, back, detail 2



Plate 3. Irene's dress, detail 3



Plate 4. Irene's dress, detail 4



Plate 5. Irene's dress, detail 5

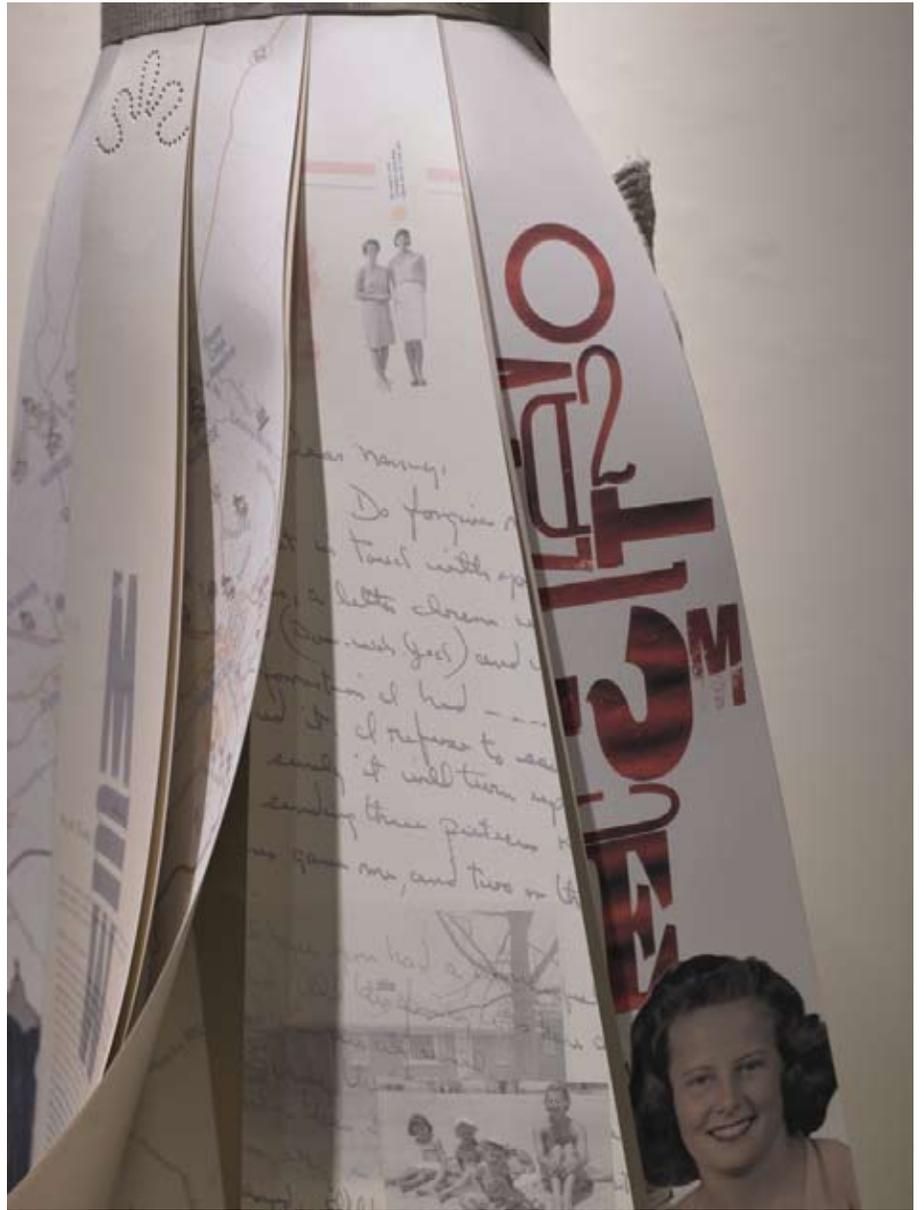


Plate 6. Irene's dress, detail 6



Plate 7. Irene's dress, detail 7



Plate 8. Irene's dress, detail 8



Plate 7. Irene's dress, detail 9



Plate 8. Irene's dress, detail 10

LIST OF REFERENCES

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Nancy Schreck completed her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in graphic design at the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida. She previously attended Atlanta College of Art for foundations courses in fine art and design studies. After spending many years working as a graphic designer in the printing and publishing industries she returned to Gainesville. There she spent seven years working as a publication designer for UF in the department of University Relations/News and Public Affairs. She returned to the College of Fine Arts at the University of Florida to fulfill a Master of Fine Arts degree in graphic design.