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Africa's Fashion Diaspora

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The *Africa's Fashion Diaspora* exhibition explores the connections between black designers from all over the world. It showcases the creation of distinctive and stunning garments, each carrying its own story or symbolic meaning. The curator of this exhibition is Elizabeth Way (Hatmaker, 2024), who showcases nine themes that include designers like Thebe Magugu. Magugu created *Tswana Mother & Child* which symbolizes Tswana motherhood. For this piece, Magugu teamed up with graphic artist, Phathy Nembilwi (Thebe Magugu, 2024), blending cultural heritage with contemporary artistry to celebrate the essence of motherhood. Additionally, the *Mother and Motherlands* theme focuses on the pivotal role mothers play in the lives of these designers, serving as sources of inspiration and passing down the knowledge of sewing (*Africa's Fashion Diaspora*, 2024). Through this theme, Magugu showcases black designers who take elements from their family and the heritage of their homeland to create designs that embody their identity.

As observed, this garment incorporates various hues, ranging from blue, deep blue, and white. Blue, one of the primary colors, is often associated with coolness and calmness, while deeper blue conveys a colder, moodier feel (Bell & Ternus, 2017). On the other hand, white is associated with neutral colors, including hues like gray, black, and brown. These hues can have warm or cool undertones. Additionally, white is often viewed as a symbol of innocence, clarity, and hope (Bell & Ternus, 2017). Together, these hues reflect a mother's love for her child, symbolizing innocence and calmness. The blue tones evoke feelings of trust and serenity, while white represents the purity and selflessness of a mother's devotion (Bell & Ternus, 2017). Therefore, the garment evokes feelings of warmth, comfort, and profound affection, illustrating the emotional bond between mother and child.

Line refers to the design elements that guide the overall structure of a garment and influence its visual effectiveness. These lines can result in vertical, horizontal, curved, and diagonal lines (Bell & Ternus, 2017). The creative illustration is presented vertically, depicting a woman cradling her child in the *Mother & Child* collection. The illustration effectively aligns with the theme, revealing the mother's affectionate and caring nature toward her child. Additionally, the illustration incorporates essential elements of African culture, such as a traditional headwrap and holding her child in a Tswana traditional garb. This motif represents femininity, showcasing motherhood, nurturing, and women's integral role in preserving cultural identity and being family-oriented.

The overall presentation is improved by *rhythm*, which produces a self-contained movement that smoothly directs the viewer's eye from the dominating object to the supporting pieces (Bell & Ternus, 2017). The *Mother & Child* illustration serves as a rhythm element, drawing attention as the main attraction on the front of the dress, with each detail visible. These elements are positioned where they belong to visually blend with the theme, representing motherhood throughout South African cultures such as Basotho, Zulu, Swazi, Vhavenda, Vatsonga, Bapedi, Tswana, Xhosa and Ndebele (Spedding, 2023).

Form encompasses various elements of depth, volume, and structure in a garment, creating a dynamic appearance. This is because form represents the three-dimensional qualities of shapes and objects (Bell & Ternus, 2017). However, form of a garment influences its appearance, making it more appealing. A well-constructed shape can enhance or modify the

silhouette, gaining visual attraction and captivating the garment. When wearing the “Mother & Child,” dress, it is a loose fitting that gives the dress movement and dimension, giving it a flowing effect. As the wearer moves, the folds of the dress draw attention to certain areas of the body, such as the waist and hips, revealing the artistry's main motif.

Balance is an essential design principle involving visual weight distribution throughout the composition (Bell & Ternus, 2017). This ensures a balanced and harmonious design in which each element contributes equally to the overall appeal and no design overpowers the others.

Contrast is a technique that conducts various visual components to produce a striking visual impact (Bell & Ternus, 2017). As these vary by color, shape, texture, and size, designers can grasp attraction to specific areas and enhance overall composition. When effectively incorporated, contrast adds visual interest and engagement to a collection, emphasizing certain parts of the garment and creating a strong sense of focus. For example, the “Mother & Child” garment piece employs the contrast technique, juxtaposing two distinct shades of blue across various shapes on the sleeve and front of the dress. This visual contrast is further enhanced by the illustration motif, featuring a mother adorned in traditional Taswana garb and a headwrap, both in complementary hues of blue. Overall, contrast is a powerful tool that can be used to create visually appealing and engaging compositions.

Making one or more components stand out more than others is known as *Dominance* in design (Bell & Ternus, 2017). As a result, the viewer’s attention is drawn to the focus point, highlighting the most essential element of the design. In this case, the garment’s dominance is established by making it the primary focus of the illustration. It is the first element that captures the viewer’s attention, highlighting its importance in the composition and reflecting on the theme. This approach strengthens the design’s theme, ensuring that the garment remains the focal point and conveys the intended message effectively.

Proportion refers to how the size and the various elements relate to each other and to the overall layout. When elements are well-proportioned, they create a sense of balance and harmony, making the design pleasing (Bell & Ternus, 2017). The balance in the *Mother & Child* piece not only enhances its overall aesthetic appeal but also ensures the design effectively resonates with its intended audience. For instance, proportion allows each piece to contribute to a cohesive look without overwhelming the display (Bell & Ternus, 2017). When proportions are well-balanced the composition looks aesthetically pleasing, resulting in a harmonious look where all elements complement one another.

Repetition involves using similar or identical elements repeatedly in a space or layout to create a cohesive and consistent look. This technique helps to establish a rhythm or pattern, making the design feel unified and harmonious (Bell & Ternus, 2017). By repeating specific design elements like colors, shapes, and textures, a designer makes the visuals more recognizable and memorable. The repetition of colors, lines, and cultural motifs in the "*Mother & Child*" piece not only creates a visually cohesive and appealing design but also reinforces its deeper narrative, celebrating the universal themes of motherhood, heritage, and cultural identity. This thoughtful use of repetition not only enhances the aesthetic value of the piece but also ensures that its

message resonates deeply with viewers, leaving a lasting impression of connection and cultural pride.

Texture is a sensory experience that encompasses both visual and physical qualities. Visually, texture can be perceived through variations in light and shadow, suggesting a surface's smoothness or roughness (Bell & Ternus, 2017). Physically, texture is experienced through direct touch, allowing us to feel the surface's smoothness, roughness, or other qualities (Bell & Ternus, 2017). The texture based on the garment should feel soft on the skin, giving a comfortable feeling to the wearer. Based on visual appearance, the most dominant fabric on the garment is 100% recycled polyester (Magugu, 2024). However, 100% recycled polyester that features chemically recycled fibers is known to produce the highest quality fibers (The Textile Kit, 2021). Due to the garment being 100% recycled polyester, the garment would fit loosely to allow for comfort and airflow, allowing easy movement. Additionally, the garment should drape well, contouring the body in a way that highlights the recycled polyester's lightweight and breathable qualities. Visually, the fabric should appear sleek, with a clean appearance without appearing too rigid. Lastly, the garment should be neither too tight nor overly loose, maintaining the complements of the wearer's shape while emphasizing the fabric's high-quality finish.

The garment that I chose is meaningful because our lives originate with our mothers, giving us life and bringing us into the world. However, we learn about African dress through societal issues through celebrities like Beyonce. For example, Beyonce developed a 85-minute visual album called, *Black Is King*. Throughout the visual album, she reinterprets *The Lion King* and explores themes of Black identity and pride (McDuffie, 2020). Similarly, Thebe Magugu celebrates the pride of women in African cultures and the essence of motherhood. The illustration on the dress that Magugu presents reflects how women physically carry a lot on their heads as it is a symbol of the responsibilities of women in African families (Spedding, 2023). This imagery underscores the integral role of African women, celebrating their strength and commitment to family and cultural heritage.

Inspired by the ongoing fight against racial injustices, following the death of George Floyd, Beyonce highlights the power of Black Lives Matter protests and the resilience of the Black community (McDuffie, 2020). The album stands as a powerful tribute to Black culture, celebrating strength and unity. Furthermore, throughout Beyonce's career, she represents Black female empowerment. For example, *Black Is King* combines her personal and universal perspective that features her family, cultural icons, and African settings (McDuffie, 2020). Through this blend, she creates a celebration of Black excellence and identity. This connects to the *Mother & Child* piece, as it symbolizes womanhood and the strength of mothers within African families. It highlights how these women stay strong throughout obstacles.

Figure 1
Magugu. "Mother & Child" Fall 2024



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