
FASHION FUTURES

In his 2019 New Museum exhibition *The Anthropophagic Effect*, artist Jeffrey Gibson created performance garments juxtaposing Native American traditional crafts with contemporary fashion techniques, including digital printing, brilliant colors, letters and words. To make these garments, indigenous artists taught Gibson several indigenous handcraft techniques that tribes practiced across what is now the United States and Canada far before European settlers arrived. The artists keep these traditions alive by practicing and teaching them to others. Gibson learned Southeastern **river cane basket weaving**, Algonquian **birch bark biting**, and **porcupine quillwork**. Using contemporary aesthetics mixed with traditional handcrafts allows Gibson to look to the past and the present to embody a multiplicity of identities. In addition to making multi-process garments, Gibson organized a series of performances and photoshoots to activate these garments in his New Museum exhibit.

“I engage materials and techniques as strategies to describe a contemporary narrative that addresses the past in order to place oneself in the present and to begin new potential trajectories for the future.”

–Jeffrey Gibson, The Anthropophagic Effect, 2019

To learn more about Gibson’s use of indigenous crafts and contemporary motifs, concepts and materials, you can watch a **video** or **listen** to a statement from the artist.

KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

- **indigenous:** a (group of) people, plants or animals native to, or originating from a particular place
- **fashion:** trend in style of dress, hair, and clothing in a given time period and region
- **garment:** a piece of clothing
- **identity:** how a person describes and thinks of him/her/themself. Identity can shift or change over time.
- **colonialism:** the practice of entering and taking over another person’s or people’s land, acquiring or taking full or partial political and economic

control

- **crafts**: skills-based activities using specific materials to make something new. Crafts can involve the hands, mouth, and other parts of the body, and are often linked to specific cultures and traditions.
- **seam**: the line where two fabrics are sewn together
- **drape**: to arrange clothing loosely around your body or a mannequin to see how it will fit and how much you need to cover the body
- **armor**: metal coverings formerly worn by soldiers to protect their bodies in battle, or a form of social, emotional or physical protection



START WITH ART: JEFFREY GIBSON

- How would you describe the **garment** in the foreground of this photograph?
- What colors do you see? What materials do you think the artist used
- How would you describe the background wall? Do the colors on the wall relate to the colors in the garments?
- Do you see the photographs in the garment? Who do you think is in the photographs?
- Can you imagine these garments being worn? How might the person wearing them move? Could they dance, run, jump, or pose as if in a fashion show?
- What do you notice about how the garments are presented in this museum installation? Is the presentation different from how clothing hangs in your closet at home?
- How might this installation relate to Gibson's interest in **indigenous**

crafts, contemporary fashion and explorations of identity?

In the artist's words:

"...In many indigenous cultures, a garment is made for somebody specifically. It's very different from fashion in the sense that it's not transferrable. That idea of how they're suspended from the ceiling comes from the idea that there's a garment which is looking over you that's representative of protection; it's representative of a familial, generational, cultural history. And it really impressed me that people would believe that this garment could protect them. And the subject isn't really about whether that's true or not. The subject for me is about could I potentially have that belief...?"

– Jeffrey Gibson, Meet the Artist: Jeffrey Gibson I Whitney Biennial 2019

LOOK AROUND

- What kind of clothing do you see in your closet or dressers? How is this clothing similar to or different from the clothes in your parents' or siblings' closets?
- Do you have different outfits for different occasions? Are clothes for playing outside different from your clothes for family parties, birthday celebrations and going to school?
- How do you feel wearing different types of clothing?
- How do you select what to wear in the morning? Does comfort play a role? Does weather play a role?
- Do you pay attention to fashion trends? Where do you find inspiration for your style?
- Do you have clothing that provides you with a sense of safety, connection, or comfort?
- Do you have clothing that connects you to family, friends, or another group of people?
- Do you feel a personal connection or express yourself through clothing?

How might we transform fabric or existing clothing into a garment that offers us a feeling of safety or protection?

In the artist's words:

"One of the other originating inspirations for the garments was armor, and it was to think about how difference also pushes back. I would say this is probably going to weigh about, at this point, probably about 12 pounds per arm. In order to move in this garment, you really have to like kind of muster up energy to lift your arms. There's the idea that when it becomes difficult, somehow that represents defeat, and I shifted my mind to thinking, it's like, oh, that actually represents progress or movement in the face of a challenge. So if you feel the resistance, then that means that you're actually moving in...the right direction..."

– Jeffrey Gibson, Meet the Artist: Jeffrey Gibson I Whitney Biennial 2019

MAKE ART

Let's create our own **clothing** from fabric, buttons, beads, old t-shirts, or other old clothing we find in our closets, or clothing a parent or sibling gives us.

Materials

- Fabric in different colors and patterns
- Buttons, beads, ribbons, lace, trim and other materials
- Wet glue, like Elmers
- Scissors
- A needle and thread
- Stapler and staples
- Paper and drawing media
- Pencil
- Measuring tape
- Optional: fabric markers, acrylic paint, paintbrushes and a cup for water.

Making

1. Start by thinking about the idea of safety and protection, and how fabrics feel. Which fabrics feel safe and protective? Are they soft, bumpy, rough, textured?
2. Gather fabric and clothing that you know you can cut or alter, and think about which ones feel protective, or how you can change them to feel like armor.
3. Before making any changes to existing clothing or fabric, you might want to make a sketch on paper to imagine how your final garment will look.
4. If you need ideas or inspiration, you can do research online, including viewing **Coco Pink Princess**, a girl in Tokyo who shares her fashion choices on Instagram.
5. After making one or more sketches, look at the materials and clothing you have gathered. Try to match your materials to your sketch. If they don't match, how can you alter your materials to look like your sketch?
6. Before cutting or sewing, drape or wrap fabrics around your body to see how much material you'll need. Try on existing clothing to see how it fits and how you'd like to change it.
7. Use a pencil to mark where you might want to cut or sew, glue or staple fabrics or clothing together. Make sure that fabrics overlap. Usually 1/4" is used for the overlap or seam. You can use a tape measure to make sure you have 1/4", or just estimate by eye.
8. If you know how to sew and can thread a needle, you can sew your fabrics or clothing together along the line where you want your seam. If you're not sure how to sew, you can glue your fabrics on this line, or staple them together.
9. Keep in mind that stitches and staples can be removed, and glue is permanent.

10. After sewing, gluing or stapling pieces together, take a look at the overall effect. Does your garment need more color? Does it need more texture? Does it match your sketch or concept?
11. Consider adding beads, buttons, lace and other trim. You might even use trim to cover the places where fabrics join.
12. After you've assembled your garment and any glue has dried, try it on!
13. Take a selfie or have a family member take a photograph of you.

REFLECTION

- How did you feel wearing your garment? Did it feel like a layer of protection? Did it feel safe or comforting?
- Try making different movements in your garment. Do you have full range of motion, or are your movements restricted? Is the garment heavy or light? Does it influence the way you move?
- Did you design your garment to be worn in a specific place or for a specific purpose? You might want to try wearing your garment to that place and have a family member photograph you.
- Gibson's garments are worn by performers, who "activate" them, or add new layers of identity to the garments based on who they are. Is there another family member or friend who can try on your garment? Does the garment change when another person wears it?

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MUSEUM

IMAGES:

"Jeffrey Gibson: The Anthropophagic Effect." 2019. Exhibition view: New Museum, New York. Photo: Maris Hutchinson / EPW Studio

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