

Master Class Report on the Casentino Cloth – “DREAM” Project

By Luisa Salvioli

1. Our creation

The tailoring master class (*Course of design, artistic tailoring and natural fibers*) was organized as part of the DREAM European Program (*Design Recherche Europe Art Métiers*) with the collaboration of OMA (*Osservatorio dei Mestieri d'Arte*) of Florence, at the *Old Fashion* couture house in Florence.

Another nine girls from five European countries participated in it with me. The work was carried out in groups made up of two peoples of different nationalities and fate put a Spanish girl called Veronica at my side, who would see to the design side while I would deal with the technical aspects of tailoring.

Each group drew a different color of *Casentino* cloth and we got white. We were to create a skirt and a shoulder shrug using this fabric.



It was not easy to get started the first days, and especially to find a suitable idea on which we both agreed. Little by little however we started developing a model that was convincing for both of us.



For the skirt, we started from the idea of a geographical map on which were traced intersecting roads, rendered with black thread stitching on the *Casentino* cloth. These lines were then to converge at a single point that would represent the meeting point between different cultures and countries.



Veronica liked using a “balloon” as the idea for the skirt that would suggest a globe and therefore, in a certain sense, a group of cultures. For practical reasons, we did not use this idea because, being very heavy, the *Casentino* cloth could not properly render the desired shape.

At first we had decided to insert some black *Tulle*, cut into stripes and rolled, thus drawing some straight lines on the fabric (like the parallels on a map), but after various trials we realized that the rolled-up *Tulle* created confusion in the drawing. We therefore tried to leave the *Tulle* free, sewn only in the centre and open, 2.5 cm wide and in this way we got a result we liked more.





In the following days, when we had a theoretical definition of the skirt, I started constructing the paper pattern with a *Basque*, making it with three upward folds. At that point I cut the fabric and sewed the lines on the skirt to see the overall effect and verify it was what Veronica had in mind. Many of the lines, as I said, were to converge at a point where we would put a button.







In the final days, we together decided how to work out the back of the skirt. We liked the idea of a train so we cut some *Tulle* and, to make it blend better with the rest of the skirt, sewed a stripe of *Casentino* cloth on the hem. This drape was only partly inserted onto the *Basque* and then dropped to the ground. Another part instead, was taken up on the front to the point marked by the button.



Two buttons were used, a white one for the skirt and a black one for the shoulder shrug. The latter, devised by Veronica who also collaborated with its creation, was designed to be close-fitting at the shoulders, with some folds only on the left side to repeat those of the *Basque*.





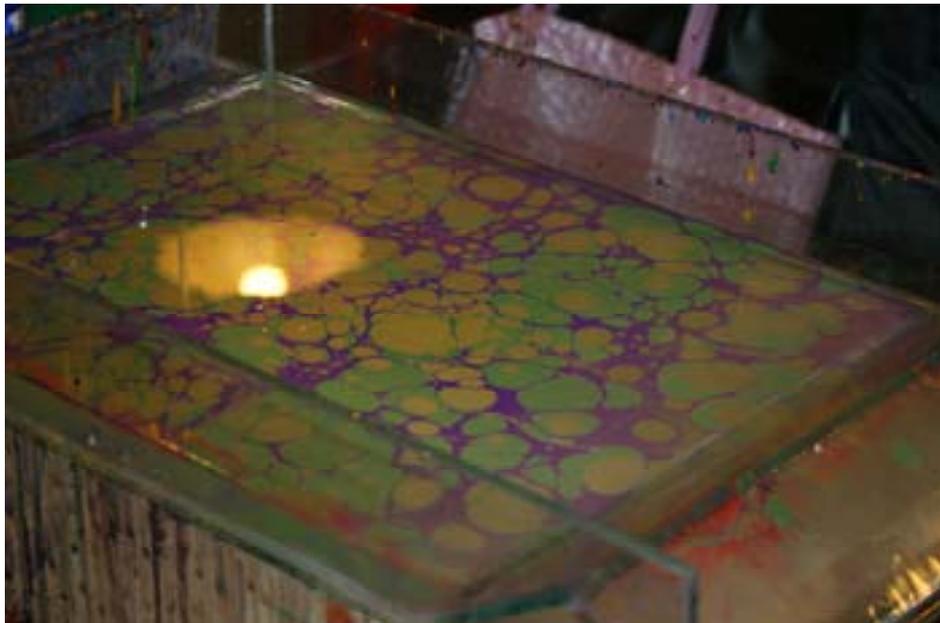
2. Lessons and visits

During the master class, we also had other very interesting lessons and went on interesting visits where we learned some useful things on some craft techniques. We attended a theoretical lesson on *Casentino* cloth with Professor Menchi and another on the theory and practice of natural dyeing given by Marie Astier at the *Istituto Artigianelli* in Florence. During the lesson on dyeing we did some practical tests using logwood and goldenrod on various kinds of fabrics, to verify in real terms the different result depending on the type of fabric handled.





The visit to the *Papiro*, a shop in the center of Florence that produces objects decorated with hand-made paper, was very amusing. We saw hand-printing on paper and even did some practical tests.





Another visit was to the *Pitti Bimbo* fair with Professor Menchi. This experience was also very interesting.

3. A positive experience

The experience of working as a team with the designer Veronica was very stimulating and positive. At the beginning we had some difficulties in organizing the work and choosing the model to carry out, but once we found a common idea, we went on resolutely and the work was fluent and pleasant.

Our way of communicating was especially funny. At first we both tried to speak English but then, also many words in Italian and Spanish came out of our mouths and we realized that we understood each other better. As a result, we each spoke directly in our own language.

Overcoming the initial difficulties both in terms of language and of finding an idea we both liked, was truly satisfying for me. When, at the end, I saw the result of our work, I understood how far we can go with good will and cooperation.



During the master class, I also got to know the other, mostly foreign, girls in the course. I therefore had the opportunity to compare our different cultures, an experience that enriched my knowledge in real terms.



Working with *Casentino* cloth made this master class something special also from the point of view of my technical knowledge. In fact I was able to appreciate the versatility of this fabric that I once considered suitable only for classic or traditional clothes.

I would also like to stress the availability and support of the teachers Irma Schwegler and Daniele Davitti during the whole master class, who successfully helped us find the best technical solutions, while at the same time showing a great sensitivity in respecting our original ideas.



I can therefore declare that this experience truly helped me to develop from a technical, cultural and human point of view.

