

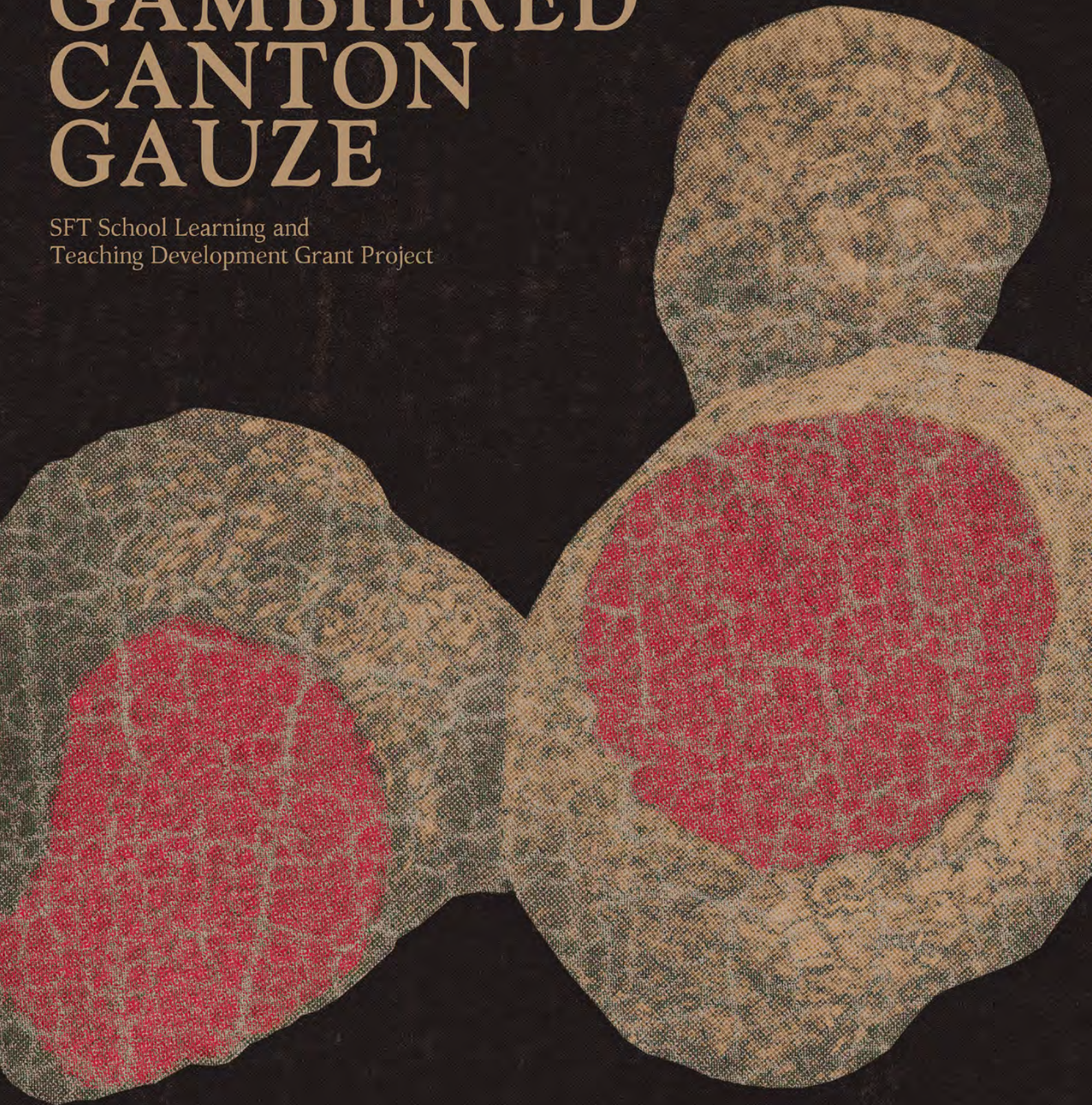
Appreciation of *Intangible Cultural Heritage*
Through *Constructive Design Research*



f School of
Fashion &
Textiles

The Craftsmanship of GAMBIERED CANTON GAUZE

SFT School Learning and
Teaching Development Grant Project



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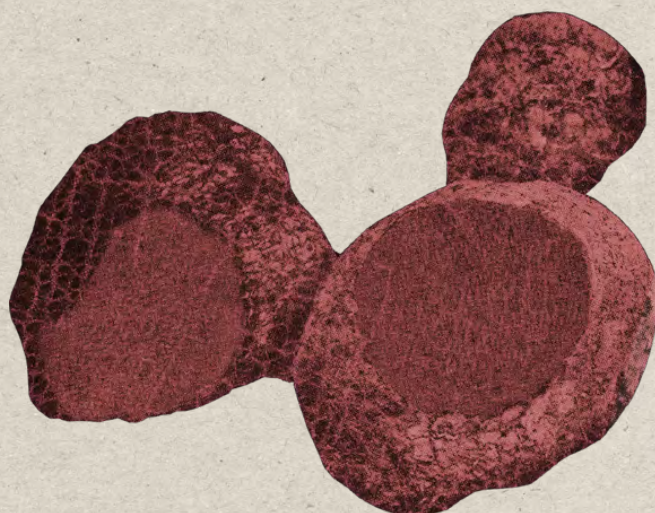
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During the project progress, the project team has received support, advice, and assistance from various parties. We express our sincere gratitude to (In alphabetical order) Mr. Albert Chan, Mr. Andrew Lau, Ms. Eunice Lee, Dr. Evelyn Liang, Mr. Patrick Lau, Ms. Sabrina Chan, and Xiangyunsha Intangible Cultural Heritage Park.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Textiles have long served as tangible carriers and artistic expressions of cultures, reflecting the intangible philosophies, aesthetics, and socio-cultural values of their origins. The long-established Lingnan culture, a strategic cultural development focus of the Greater Bay Area, has been the cradle of many distinguished textile crafts. Among these, the gambiered canton gauze, commonly known as Xiangyunsha or mud-silk, stands out as one of the world-renowned textiles developed from this rich cultural heritage.

In 2023 and 2024, School of Fashion and Textiles (SFT) of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) organized a learning and teaching development project titled “Appreciation of Intangible Cultural Heritage Through Constructive Design Research – The Craftsmanship of Gambiered Canton Gauze”. The project introduced the traditional craftsmanship of gambiered canton gauze, which is a representative intangible cultural heritage (ICH) of the nation, to SFT students together with the sustainable textile philosophy and folk wisdoms of the Lingnan culture.

The project engaged students through a series of experiential and practice-based learning activities, including interactive seminars, a field trip to the origin of the craft, and a guided practical design project. The students investigated contemporary fashion design possibilities of this traditional textile and shared their creativity and learning outcomes with the PolyU community and general public in the form of physical and virtual exhibitions.

SEMINAR



In the interactive seminar, students reviewed the features and characteristic of the textile samples and shared their initial observation and creative ideas.

The seminar served as the start of the learning experience, building the knowledge foundation for students to further investigate the textile craft and fashion design possibility. In league with two textile specialists, Mr Albert Chan and Ms Eunice Lee, the project team introduced the background, history, ICH development, production principle and process, and sustainable rationale of the craftsmanship to the enrolled students. Under guidance, the students reviewed a collection of various types of gambiered canton gauze and discussed the design possibility in the space of contemporary fashion application.

FIELD TRIP



SFT organized a field trip to the origin of the craft – Foshan for students to investigate the historical development and practical production process of the textile. Textile specialists, fibre artists, and ICH practitioners were invited to engage and exchange ideas with our students.

Gambiered canton gauze is a lightweight, water-repellent silk fabric, characterized by its iconic glossy black surface and rust-colored backside. Its creation poetically utilizes the climatic advantages and geographical nutrients harvested from the fertile Foshan region's ecosystem. The craftsmanship involves a series of complex and repetitive natural dyeing and finishing procedures. This eco-friendly process transfers minerals stored in river mud onto the textile surface by coating silk fabrics overdyed with shoulang yam. This unique craftsmanship demonstrates a deep respect for nature and embodies the folk wisdom of the region accumulated over centuries. In recognition of its significant cultural value, the craft of gambiered canton gauze was inscribed onto the national Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of China in 2008.

The silk fabric of mellow elegance showcases an expansive array of design and innovation possibilities in the hands of contemporary fashion designers. Students of SFT had the privilege of visiting the Xiangyunsha Intangible Cultural Heritage Park in Foshan, where they delved into the intricate techniques of weaving, dyeing, solarizing, coating, and finishing passed down through generations of skilled artisans. This experience also instilled a profound appreciation for the sustainable textile philosophy underlying this craft.

From the fabric yardages and shoulang yam solution preparations, the repetitive dyeing and sunning processes, to the mud-coating and washing procedures, students witnessed the transformation of the textile and solidified the concept of botanical dyeing and sustainable textiles introduced in the seminar.



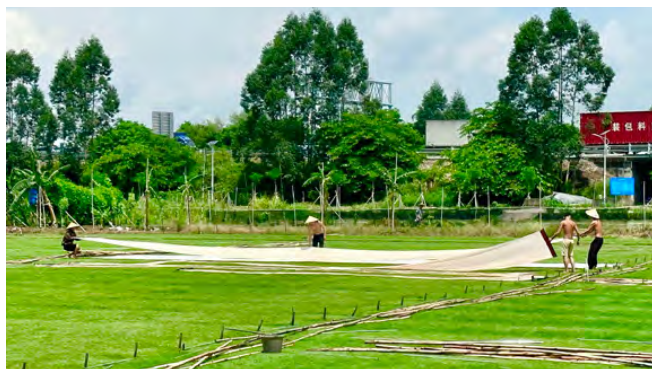
The study tour visited the Xiangyunsha Museum at the ICH Park and learned the history and development of the craft as well as the relationship between the textile, community, economy and, eco-system of the Pearl River Delta.



The weaving principles and structures of diverse types of silk leno fabrics, which are the base materials for making gambiered canton gauze, were introduced to the students.



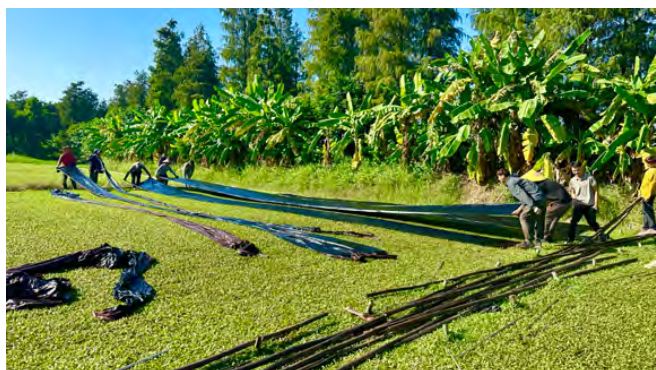
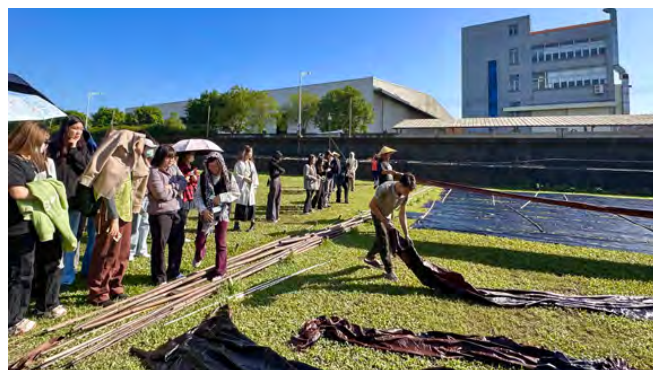
Students observed the preparation of the tannin-rich shoulang yam dyeing solution, which enhances the tensile strength of the base fabric and bonds the ferric iron in the river-mud coating with the textile.



Silk fabrics are cut into pieces with spreads of twenty to twenty-five meters. The fabrics are then dyed in multiple shoulang yam dye baths until attaining a reddish-brown colour. The tour visited the sunning ground and students reviewed the fabrics of different stages.



A layer of river-mud extracted from the unpolluted river surge of the region is coated on the tannin-soaked silk fabric. The coated pieces are rested for 45 minutes to allow the magic-like chemical reaction between tannin and river-mud coating.

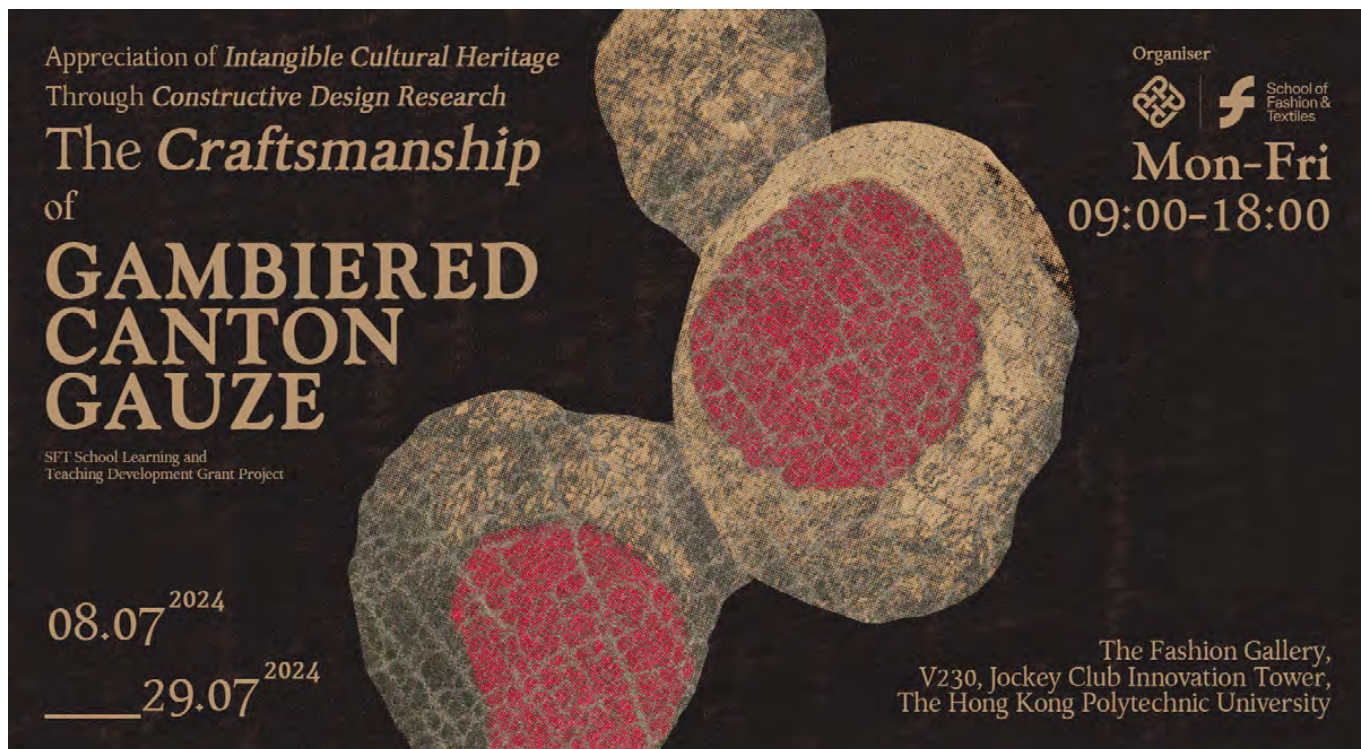


The coated pieces are then washed manually with a recycled stream of river water, revealing the iconic glossy black surface of gambiered canton gauze. The fabrics are then sun-dyed and dew-softened on the meadow before putting in dark storage for a year of stabilization and fastness enhancement.



Students had also practiced various botanical dyeing techniques and solidified their understandings of sustainable textiles.

EXHIBITION



Appreciation of *Intangible Cultural Heritage*
Through *Constructive Design Research*

The *Craftsmanship*
of
**GAMBIERED
CANTON
GAUZE**

SFT School Learning and
Teaching Development Grant Project

08.07²⁰²⁴
— 29.07²⁰²⁴

Organiser
School of Fashion & Textiles

Mon-Fri
09:00-18:00

The Fashion Gallery,
V230, Jockey Club Innovation Tower,
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

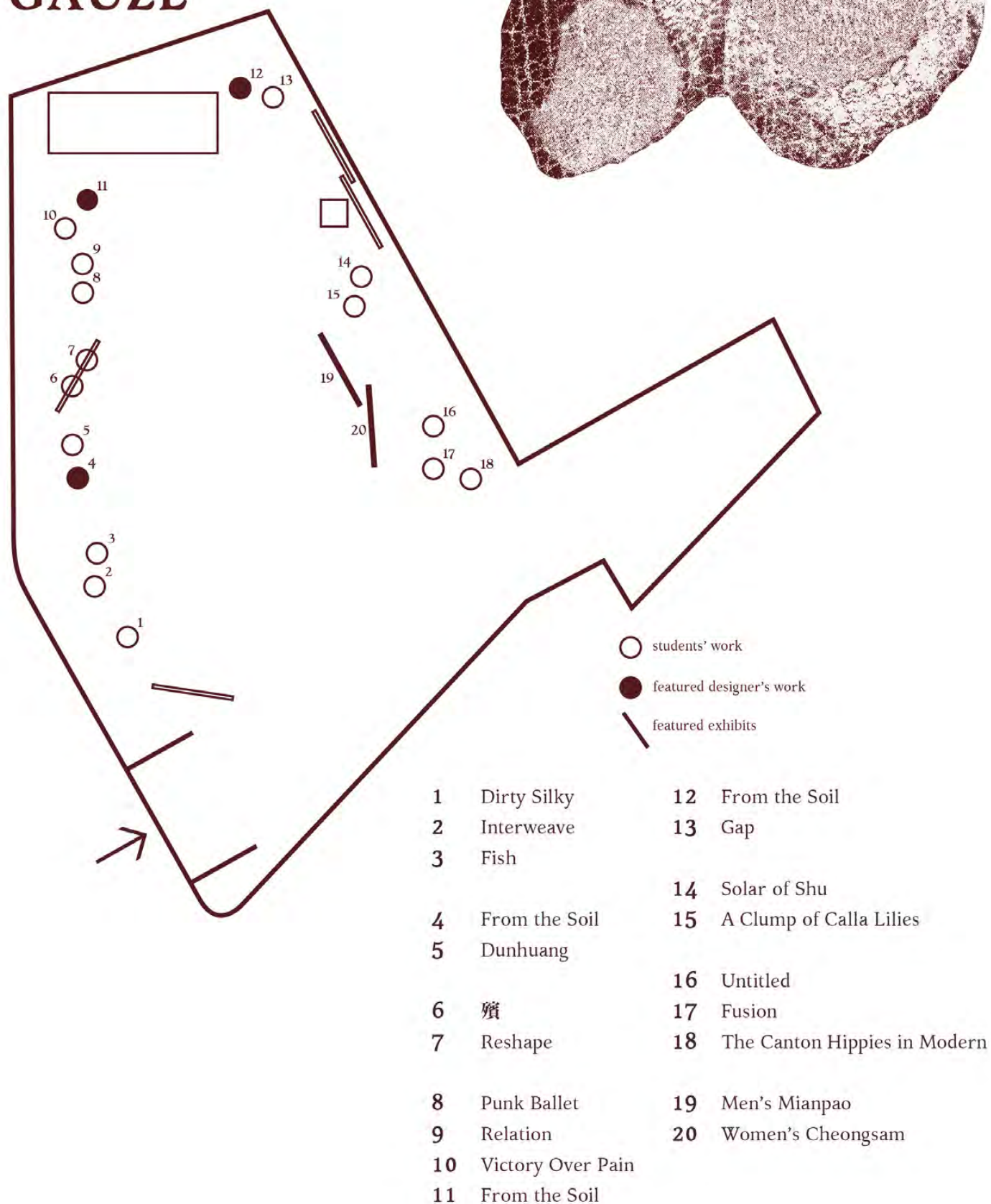
Access the Virtual Exhibition here:



In succession to the study tour, students were provided yardages of gambiered canton gauze and explored the fashion application possibilities of the traditional textile under guidance. A contemporary fashion collection was created for a physical exhibition at the Fashion Gallery with a virtual exhibition launched on the SFT Interactive Platform for Practical Design.

Fashion designer and textile artist, Mr Andrew Lau who mastered his fashion and textile design expertise at Central Saint Martins, was invited to review students' works and curate the exhibition series. In July 2024, the thematic exhibitions were launched to share the project outcomes with the PolyU community and general public.

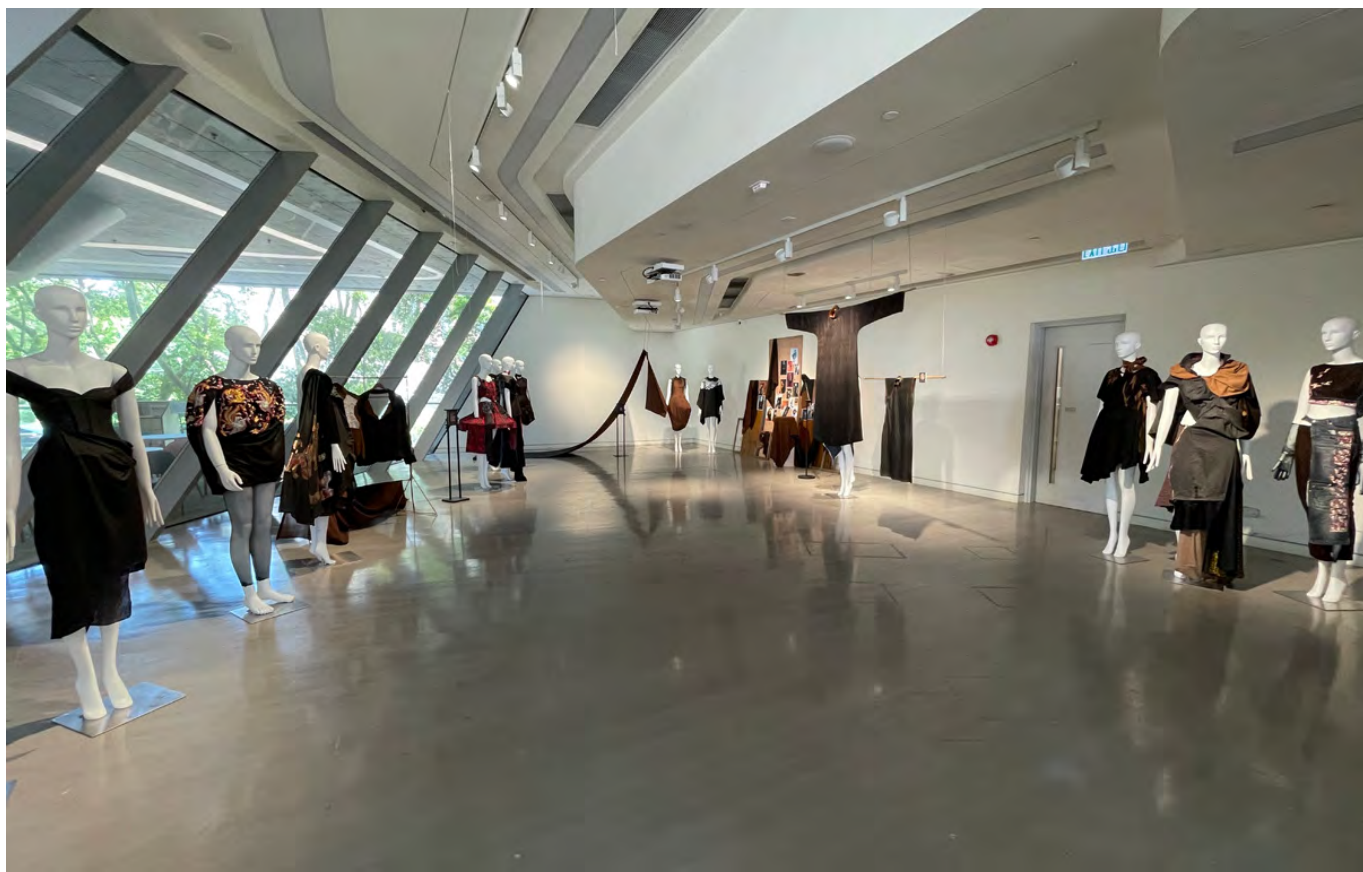
On display was a creative evolution of this traditional textile, where students present fresh and diverse designs, expanding the potential of classic patterns and exploring new uses for gambiered canton gauze. This exhibition offers a modern reimagining of heritage fabrics, seamlessly merging folk wisdom and traditional craftsmanship with contemporary aesthetics.



EXHIBITION'S PHOTOS







DESIGNERS' STATEMENTS

DIRTY SILKY

by

Lau Hei Nga

Gambiered Canton Gauze

1

Mud-silk is a rare and expensive fabric made by traditional Chinese craftsmanship. A fabric that is filled with the beauty of Chinese culture. However, this Dirty Silky is a twist. It is a nasty and sexy office lady set made with 2 different types of mud-silk. Especially the “NOT Allow Panties Skirt” showcases the ultimate sexiness with a simple design. The contrast between the traditional Chinese culture and the Western sexy vibe creates an interesting outcome. You may think it is a suit set with heavy-weight fabric at first glance. However, mud-silk is a really thin layer of gauze with the illusion of “heavy-weight fabric”. Dirty Silky is an outfit with a simple design but fun contrast and details.







INTERWEAVE

by

Lee Hoi Kiu and Hui Hei Yan

Gambiered Canton Gauze

2

Globalization has significantly intensified the movement and migration of people across the globe. Within this rich tapestry of multiculturalism, the outfit draws inspiration from the symbolism found in the belongings and journeys of immigrants. These elements are then transferred into different geometric shapes. Instead of drawing a particular fashion sketch, we decided to let the pattern take the lead for the design. We rearrange the shapes in different orders and size to create the pattern of the garment. Using the inspiration picture as reference, draping is then applied base on the form to create the outfit.





FISH

by

Anna

Gambiered Canton Gauze

3

A captivating fish-themed long dress that exudes aquatic elegance. Drawing inspiration from the intricate structure of fish bones and the graceful lines of fish fins, this dress embodies the fluidity and beauty of the underwater world. The design features delicate fish bones and fins, creating a harmonious blend of structure and softness. The flowing silhouette mimics the gentle movement of fins, giving the dress an ethereal and airy quality. Perfect for those who appreciate nature's artistry, this dress pays homage to the serenity and mystique of aquatic life. This piece invites viewers to dive into elegance and let their imagination swim through the serene depths of aquatic inspiration.







DUNHUANG

by

Sandy Lai and Wendy Lai

Gambiered Canton Gauze / Polyester / Silk Organza / Cotton / Iron Rings

Design Concept: It is inspired by the Dunhuang murals. We can know the history, art, life of ancient people and other cultures of ancient China from Dunhuang murals. As we would like to show the special color effect that look like Dunhuang murals, the oxidized foil (foil burning) is used in fabric making to reflect Dunhuang. It is recreating the bright colors and splendor of the Dunhuang murals before they were oxidized.

Foil burning (燒箔) is a Chinese metal craft technology and a national intangible cultural heritage. Burning foil produces other colors through heat treatment and chemical reaction. In the whole outfit (including dress and coat), the design not only focuses on using Gambiered Canton Gauze, it also mixing traditional culture and Chinese metal craft technology to allow more different cultures can be integrated, innovated and passed on.







殯

by

Tse Yau Kit

Gambiered Canton Gauze / Cotton

6

Whether in rural or urban areas, the funeral is the final step of the funeral is quite grand. The funeral is a dynamic process, which refers to transporting the spiritual pivot from the home to the cemetery and successfully burying the deceased, often called the "last journey." Among them, the eldest son carries the flags to raise the spirit. The second son throws the tile basin and the paper money on the way to the funeral. These are all indispensable steps in the process of the funeral and are also indispensable important customs in the funeral culture.







RESHAPE

by

Jim Yu Ching

Gambiered Canton Gauze / Silk / Resin

7

"Even the world breaks you into pieces, you will find your way to reshape and empower, rebuild and return like nobody else." The design explores the empowerment in disruptive beauty. Disruptive beauty refers to how the inner self is grown and rebuilt after going through pain or sacrifices.

"A warrior, left in the dark" is the character given to the design. The only man standing, full of pain but still fighting hard just to survive. We will encounter failure and events that may disrupt our beliefs. By embracing all imperfections happened on oneself, one will be empowered and be built stronger.

Wounds and patchwork being the primary expression in disruptive events are used as key design element to convey hurt and pain. Pattern of wounds are reimaged through 3D printing of micro spikes in blood-like red to present pain visually and in touch. Patchwork of mud-silk and organza is used to convey the idea of embracing imperfections when scars on body can be seen positively.







PUNK BALLET

by

Katherine Liu

Gambiered Canton Gauze / Cotton / Rayon / Polyester

8

My work combines the traditional ballet style with the punk rock style, including a corset and a Tutu skirt with a bustle. Elements such as ribbons and boning are used to highlight the elegant feature, while the red plaid, perforated knitted fabric, and spray paint are used to express modern rebellion. The hot stamping and stitching are used on the gambiered canton to create different textures. The whole outfit inherits the classics and demonstrates a rebellious and innovative spirit of traditional culture. At the same time, it is also a new application of traditional Chinese fabric, gambiered canton gauze, through different processes.





RELATION

by

TY

Gambiered Canton Gauze / Cotton / Red Thread

9

I aim to develop different forms for the mud-silk within my conceptual work “Relation” When we interact with others, we unconsciously create personal space around ourselves, divided into four zones: intimate, personal, social, and public. This concept is known as proxemics in communication. As we develop deeper connections, we allow others to enter our more intimate zones. The relationship between people is often likened to being tied together by "red threads" - a metaphor from Chinese mythology, where the god Yue Lao binds destined couples with a red cord, symbolising their predestined bond.







VICTORY OVER PAIN

by

Li Sze Wing

Gambiered Canton Gauze / Velvet

10

Whether it's emotional pain from loss and heartbreak, or physical pain from injury and illness, we all face adversity and suffering at various points in our lives. We get hurt, but we go ahead. We grow from the pain and become stronger. The adversity is like a vortex restricting our move, but we never stop our steps. We broke and rebuilt. The scars are our victory marks, showing what we have come through. Our unwavering power and toughness transcend the pain, unyielding and thriving despite the tribulations. No matter how hard it is, we go on our path with faith and courage. We are all victors of pain.







GAP

by

Zhang Rongruo

Gambiered Canton Gauze

13

This design revolves around all aspects of the Gap concept. The ancients cloud: water is full overflow, full moon is deficient. By precisely controlling the laser cutting, numerous small gaps are created, which make the fabric root and break while gaining more space, giving the garment a three-dimensional sense and rich texture. On the other hand, referring to the Gap in Oriental aesthetics, the avenue is simple, and the whole skirt is directly made of a single rectangular piece of fabric, in which the waist and hip are simply outlined by two arcs, without more modification.







SOLAR OF SHU

by

Hu Manying

Gambiered Canton Gauze / Silk / Acetate / Polyester

14

The dress is themed around the myth of the sun bird from the ancient Shu kingdom. The silhouette of the garment is loose and flowing, with a deconstructed collar inspired by the traditional cheongsam. The color palette reflects the layers of sunrise and incorporates the sun bird pattern of the Shu kingdom, which has a sun in the middle with four surrounding fairy ravens, discovered in the Jinsha ruins. Some patterns of sea waves are utilized on the garment as well. Due to the lack of technology, gold paint is used to create a gliding effect, while subtle innovations in silhouette and pattern pay homage to the traditional Guangdong gambiered gauze.







A CLUMP OF CALLA LILIES

by

Huang Zifei

Gambiered Canton Gauze

15

My design was inspired by the calla lilies. Calla lilies are often seen as decorative flowers, but they are poisonous. I want to create a scene of the calla lilies blooming beside a door in the moonlight, tempting people to go there. I choose blue, black, and green as the main dress colors, and I choose gambiered Canton gauze and two-color textured satin. The dress through the design of A-line design and splicing reflects the mysterious elegance of calla lilies under the moonlight. At the same time, the unique glossy changes and natural texture of gambiered Canton gauze demonstrate the dangerous charms that secretly emerge under the surface of its elegance. The round openwork design on the back is both a symbol of a moon gate in the courtyard and a moon in the night sky.





UNTITLED

by

Feng Yue

Gambiered Canton Gauze / Reworked Cotton Garments

16

This piece was inspired by *Margerethe* and *Ladder to the sky* by artist Anselm Kiefer.

His mixed-media artworks constantly consist of the use of fibres, while discussing topics related to memories and histories, similar to the making of Gambiered Canton Gauze, they share the same weight of historical value and contemporary expression. Therefore, I used some of my unworn garments as a "canvas", and "painted" with the mud silk in the shape of Sunflower, inspired by Van Gogh's paintings, capturing the essence of the past, while illustrating a sense of nostalgic vitality.





FUSION

by

Chuyi Lai

Gambiered Canton Gauze / Linen / Cotton / Reworked Denim Jacket

17

The design concept reimagines an outdated denim jacket as the foundation for a unique, one-of-a-kind garment. By deconstructing the jacket and repurposing its materials and combine it with the mud silk, I want to create a stylish and sustainable piece that celebrates the beauty of upcycling.







THE CANTON HIPPIES IN MODERN

by

Ng Yau Nga, Ann

Gambiered Canton Gauze / Cotton (Reworked Denim)

Reused Qun Kwa Embroidery donated by Master Wong Kwok Hing from Lucky Embroidery

This design was started from a thought of exploring creative alternatives of traditional gambiered Canton gauze design. Finding the Chinese Cheongsam (qipao) and the 1960s Hippies counterculture very enchanting, I was guided by the agile, folksy, and experimental spirit of the hippies to recreate a canton gauze qipao, imagined the story of a girl from the early Republic China with a hippies belief time travelling to the modern city.

Denim with thickness and the light soft mud silk, are both folksy, yet contrastingly presented visually and by texture. I am portraying the freedom and rebellion with the use of denim, experimenting with this juxtaposition of distinct materials , and playing with deconstruction concept. The design is aimed to demonstrate a quirky balance between East and West, also conservation and freedom.

Delivering my appreciation to Chinese traditional craftsmanship, this design utilised the unwanted embroidered swatches from the 'Lucky Embroidery' Qungua company and I decided to sewn them on as the main decoration. This intricate sewing technique called 'Gold Couching', demonstrates the delicate workmanship and visual effects of the Chinese Arts.







FROM THE SOIL

Capsule Collection

by Featured Designer

Lau Hiu Lok, Andrew

Gambiered Canton Gauze / Cotton Red Thread /
Reused Embroidery from Qun Kwa sponsored by

From glorious zenith to quiet decline, now resplendent once more—this capsule collection illuminates gambiered canton gauze's splendour blooming from humble roots, woven with the wisdom of common folks.

The affluent would let their servants don new Xiangyunsha (mud-silk) first back in the days, allowing the coarse fibres to tenderly yield to time. Through humble hands, the fabric's true comfort was revealed, preparing it for the touch of elegance. It sparks the question of where does beauty begin, and why is it often seen so unilaterally? The true nature of gambiered canton gauze, where beauty lies not in opulence, but in the cherished familiarity of its everyday presence among generations, inspired the creation of this collection.

The silhouette in this collection echoes the art of crafting Chinese porcelain, especially where flawless polish meets accidental beauty in the shaping of clay. Similar to the process of making mud-silk, where delicate silk is dyed with roots of Dioscorea which is later washed with mud, clay is also a product from soil. Just as the gambiered canton gauze finds its allure in the intricate process of silk weaving, each discarded shape of clay tells a story of craftsmanship and resilience. Embracing these unintended forms and the humble birth from dirt, a rare elegance that mirrors the wisdom and weight carried by the fabric evokes beauty that transcends perfection, celebrating authenticity and timeless allure.

4

11

12



















FEATURED EXHIBITS



19

深棕復古香雲紗整染重真絲龍宮緞袷絲綿袍
Dark Brown Vintage Mud-silk Finished
Reversed Duchess Satin Mianpao
Padded with Silk-wadding

2023

秦長林師傅製作
Tailored by Master Chun Cheung Lam

20

深棕滿地核桃紋香雲紗偷襟單長衫
Dark Brown Gambiered Canton Gauze
Unlined Toujin Cheongsam
in All-over Walnut Pattern

1940s-1950s

香港收藏家轉讓
Collected from a Hong Kong Collector

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