



# Presentation

‘Crisp and fluid’

Irmgard Mkhabela, November 09, 2012

# The study of Madame Gres' fine pleating technique

## Reflections

My initial response when it was suggested I look at Madame Gres' work, was, why? Firstly, I knew a little bit about Madame Gres, again, my knowledge and interest in her work was very limited. I remember saying to myself after looking at some of her work on the web, it's not my style and besides, I did not see the need to study someone's work if I am to be original. So, for me to fashion my concept on her method of construction was going to be a challenge!

I had just had a critique session prior and what I had presented received a lot of criticism, leaving me pretty anxious. I began questioning my understanding of what's wanted and if at all I am misunderstood. This may have been the reason for my apprehension about doing the study about Madame Gres' work.

But, because I am here to learn and maybe I did not articulate my concept properly, I thought I give this a try and will revert to my idea at a later stage.

# Immersing myself in everything Gres

I am learning a lot from Gres' sculptural creations and can see the influence from the Grecian statues

Her fine pleating look deceptively easy to construct, yet they are very complex.

They require a lot of time and handling to get them right

She uses what looks like cartridge pleating and plies du soleil, including some sort of flat pleating kept flat by pick stitch.

Her draping is more like sculpting..., and is able to reduce large piece of cloth to a few centimeters with the technique she has developed.

The way she resolves excess fabric is ingenious – tucking it into a 'thing' which incidentally becomes feature...or was this deliberate?

It is also interesting to note her widespread use of a knit, silk jersey I have learnt, which yielded excellent results.

# My pleat sampling

Fabric 'factor'

Woven

I started with calico to create pleats I thought look like what she had used. They were a series of flat pleats joined with some kind of a pick stitch. But because it was the first time I did this, I was not certain...

Fine pleating on woven cloth



Fine pleating on knitted cloth



# What is it I am doing?

## Remark

The recommendation that I explore the work of Madame Gres to give context to the draping efforts and interest I have shown previously is proving helpful...

## Title

'Crisp and Fluid'

*Exploring possible draping techniques based on Madame Gres' method to create shape and form using pleating.*

## Background/Motive

- As a sculptress, Madame Gres directed cloth in a structured way around the body.
- She used symmetry and geometry in her designs.
- She used Greek tradition of draping in her designs.
- She pleated large pieces of cloth by hand into fine pleats like the 'pli du soleil' and cartridge pleats we have nowadays.

# Aim

To explore the movement of cloth on the body to conceal and/or amplify the attributes of the wearer.

To take Madame Gres' pleating method further into a modern context.

# Method

- Guiding cloth on the body in different directions.
- Develop the silhouette depending on which part of the body to focus on or accentuate.

# To do

- Still to decide on the overall silhouette, whether the area of focus will be above or below the waistline.
- Explore different pleating techniques.
- Explore different fabrics.

# The process

For the process I had to 'immerse' myself into understanding Madame Gres' way of working. This I did by:

- Reading up on the web about her background, etc.

- Possibly buying a book?
- Understanding her work methods.
- Studying of her work:
- Analyzing her designs.
- Exploring elements that characterize her work.
- Sketching her designs.
- Reproducing her designs.
- NB: A visit to an exhibition about Madame Gres in Antwerp is another option!
- Design experiments based on her principles
- Pre collection designs:
- Sketches
- Print/Photos
- Possible pre collection lineup?



# Designs I find interesting to study from Madame Gres

## Design 1



The shell shaped detail created from one piece with the dress.

It gives a 3d effect where pleats are allowed to 'hang loose' and not pulled tightly at sections.

## Design 2



The 'join' or seam created, showing different directions of the pleating.

It could be moved to the shoulder line?

## Other designs and details



More examples:



Designs I analyzed in depth, (See below!)

# Designs I am studying

## Analysis of Design 1 A

Original design of the Grey dress



## Analysis of Design 1 A - Text

A dress draped from a single piece with a pleated insert.

The insert create fullness at the front and side of the dress.

To allow movement, the hem of the dress is slashed underneath the insert.

Fine pleating is kept in place with a pick-stitch.



# Analysis of Design 2 A

Original design of Design 2 A



## Analysis of Design 2 A - Text

A dress created with symmetry

Cartridge pleating is used for the drape detail at the bust area.

Cartridge pleating is used at the sleeve head, the rest of the sleeve is draped organically and tightly at the underarm.

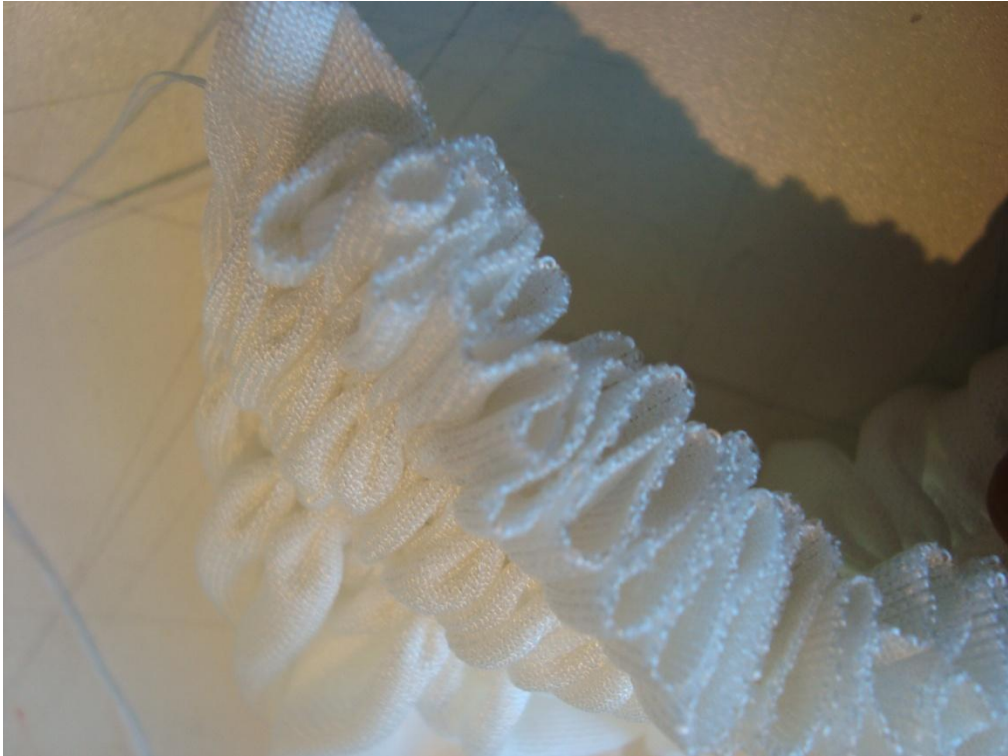
The skirt part of the dress is finely pleated at the low waist and a section, 'rolled back' or tucked neatly to indicate an 'even hand'.

Exploring elements that characterize principles of the work by Gres

Fine pleating



Cartridge pleating





Folding over and tucking in of excess cloth



## Twisting



Combination of fine pleating and loose uncontrived folds





Leaving edges raw



Pick stitch to keep pleats flat and for decorative purposes



Sketches I have done of her work, including analysis of movement.

(See copy available separately!)

# Reproducing her designs

## Sample 1 of Design 1 A



## Observations

Pleating is 'too arranged'

The front hem is not relaxed – it is pulling!

There is not much fullness at the sides.

A woven fabric is not ideal for this design.



## Sample 2 of Design 1 A



## Observations

A knit has good wrapping qualities.



## Sample 1 of Design 2 A



## Observations

The construction was clumsy with a woven synthetic.

## Sample 2 of Design 2 A



## Observations

With using a knitted fabric, it all made sense:

To move or curl the gathered detail in place was easier.

A smooth and hugging effect could be archived easily.

## Sample 3 of Design 2 A



## Close ups!



# Observations

The knit used for the top part of the dress worked very well; however, I had to get a lighter weight for the bottom.

The 'roll' at the hip area is not as well executed as that of Madam Gres' design; the following may be the reasons:

- The knit used for the skirt was very light.
- The knit used for on the upper body was too heavy.
- The execution of the detail was not well understood.

The hemline curls greatly, especially with the knit used for the skirt.

The detail at the bust area was 'helped' greatly using hand gathering. Note well: For me, I saw a need to keep the fullness in place for effective construction. Furthermore, I kept the threads for decorative reasons.

The construction of the sleeve is not great and can be improved! This is due to the lack of understanding the principles she has used to construct it.

The fabric seems to give a nice organic character to the folds.

The knit used gives a nice hugging effect at the back and front waistline.

Design experiments based on Madame  
Gres' principles:

Design A



I like the sketchy expression of this design, the crisp lines where the pleat break and the seemingly static folds.



## Design B



The knit works very well but needed a lot of time and securing in place, (helping!)

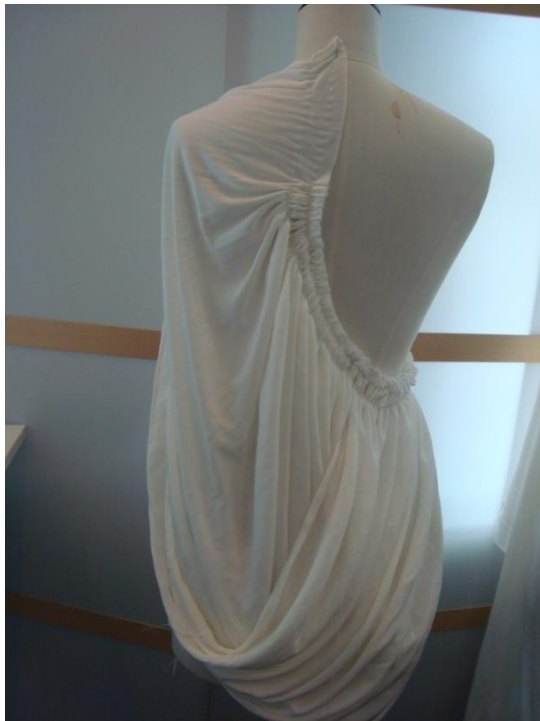
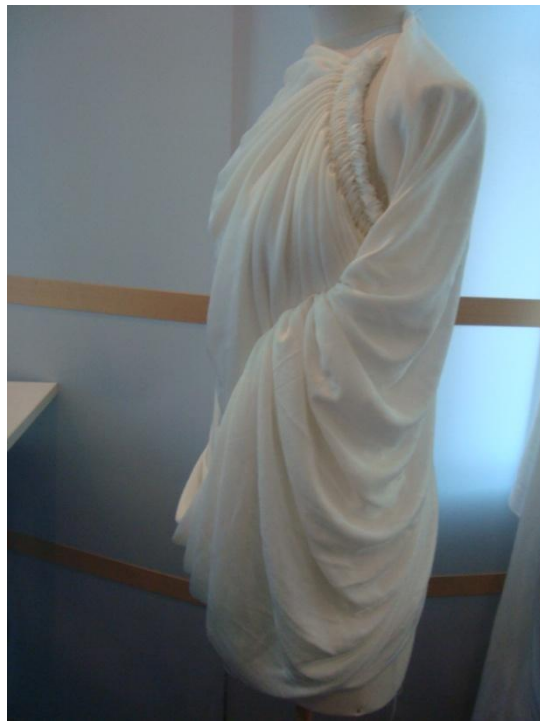
## Design C



The knit used give a nice roll and fluidity.

The vertical pleating takes long but looks good with the knit used.

## Other designs – Design D, E, F, and G:



The movement of cloth is clearly visible, including its fluidity

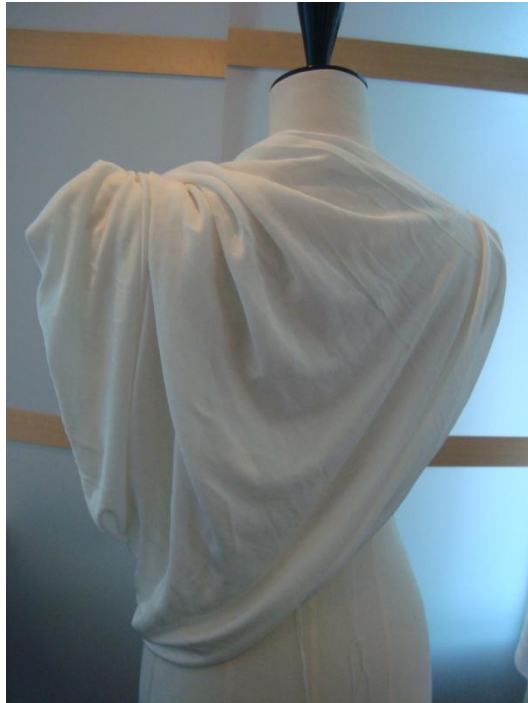


## Other designs – Design H, I, J, and K:



Designs showing the direction and fluidity of cloth.

Design L, showing all sides:



The expression of the folds in a knit is soft and flowing.

## Reflection continued!

The designs realized thus far seem 'dressy' and cover the upper body like a dress or blouse.

The challenge I now have is to apply this exercise for other garment types. The scope is wide, especially with the use of different materials

The fluidity of a knit has a different expression to the crispness of woven cotton.

Pre collection selection:

Sketches,

(See copy!)

# Print/Photos

## Design 1





# Design 2



# Design 3



# Design 4





# Design 5



# Design 6



# Design 7



Possible pre collection lineup still to be decided and a selection from the above!

# Conclusions

I can see why she would spend hours creating a garment:

- The possibilities to mould a knit are endless with this method, hence I have explored different finishing possibilities for the shoulder, side and back, (see sample!) On many occasions I have been 'seduced' by the many opportunities to 'stray' and do something else...
- The use of the 'right' fabric, guarantees success with this technique. A soft drape-knit seam to work best!
- Allow a lot of time for better results...
- The mix of controlled and free styled drape is an inspiration.