

Patchworked Polos

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Abstract

This project investigates the potential of upcycling as a method of textile reconstruction and material reuse. Two men's ties and three polo shirts were deconstructed and repurposed to create a functional tote bag. Sections of the polo shirts were cut and arranged to form a patchwork exterior, while a bow tie was incorporated as a decorative element. Working with knit fabric required careful handling due to its stretch and flexibility, influencing the construction process and final structure of the bag. The completed design demonstrates how existing garments can be reworked into new forms while reducing textile waste and encouraging creative problem-solving in apparel construction.

Research

Designer Intention Statement

This project transforms three mass-produced men's corporate polo shirts from the secondhand waste stream into a patchwork textile and reconstructed tote bag. The starting garments, originally designed for business uniformity and male presentation, are recontextualized into a feminine, individualized accessory. By converting size-specific clothing into an inclusive object usable by anyone, the design extends the life and audience of discarded apparel. This project explores how upcycling can shift identity, purpose, and value from standardized corporate uniform to personal expression.

Inspiration



(TYTKA Studio)



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Target Market

Location: Iowa City, IA
 Education level: Some college
 Age range: 18-30
 Occupation: College student; early artistic career
 Salary range: \$18,000–45,000
 Family Status: Single
 Interests and activities: Sustainable fashion, attending art markets/events, DIY projects and crafting
 Opinions: Importance in environmental responsibility

Materials



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The process began with an unfinished idea of mine: transforming a thrifted pink Polo Ralph Lauren polo shirt into a tote bag. While searching for a green polo to match the embroidered emblem on the pink shirt, I found an identical Polo Ralph Lauren shirt in green with an orange emblem. To complete the color story, I thrifted an additional orange polo to coordinate with the embroidery. These three garments became the patchwork material for the bag. A men's bow tie was added as embellishment to further emphasize the transformation of traditionally masculine clothing into a more inclusive accessory.

Budget

Items	Quantity	Cost/Item	Total Cost
Polo (pink)	1	\$1.00	\$1.00
Polo (green)	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
Polo (orange)	1	\$3.00	\$3.00
Thread	1	\$3.50	\$3.50
Bow tie	1	\$0.25	\$0.25
Ribbon spool	1	\$0.50	\$0.50
Total Cost of Budget			\$11.25

Design Process

1. Deconstruction

The polo shirts were cut apart into usable fabric panels.



2. Patchwork Assembly

Selected panels were arranged and machine sewn together to create the bag's exterior textile.



3. Bag Construction

The patchwork textile was sewn together to form the body of the tote bag.



4. Strap Reinforcement

The collars from the Polo Ralph Lauren shirts (pink and green) were repurposed and inserted to reinforce the strap.

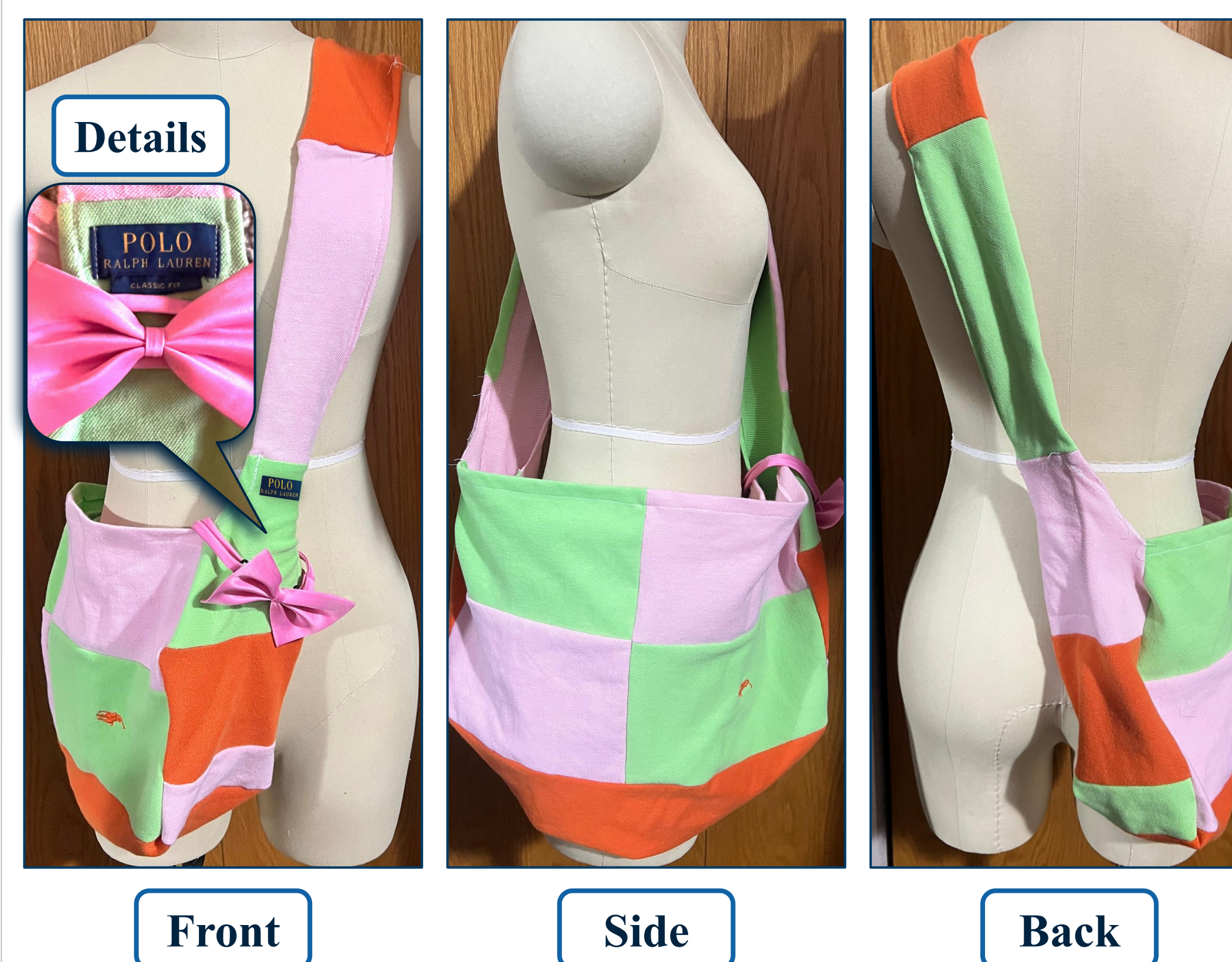


5. Embellishment

The inner neck label was applied to the exterior and paired with a men's bow tie as a decorative element.



Artifact



Front

Side

Back

Conclusion

Statement of Learning

This project highlighted the importance of balancing conceptual design with structural planning, especially when working with stretch knit fabrics. While the color coordination and patchwork construction successfully supported the theme of reconstruction and identity shift, the process emphasized how fabric weight and reinforcement affect the functionality of accessories.

Statement of Sustainability

All materials used in this project were sourced through thrifting, allowing existing garments to avoid landfills while being given a new purpose and extended lifespan.

Statement of Outcomes

The final design is a patchwork tote constructed from three men's polo shirts in pink, green, and orange, featuring a wide strap decorated with repurposed men's ties. Conceptually, the design successfully reflects the project's purpose by reassembling male-coded corporate garments into an expressive, individualized accessory that appeals to a broader, more gender-inclusive audience.

Recommendations and Implications

In future projects, I would add lining or combine knit with sturdier materials to create more structure.

References

- The padlock bag PDF pattern / medium. TYTKA Studio. (n.d.). <https://tytkastudio.com/shop/p/the-padlock-bag-pdf-pattern-medium>
- Prakodwong, S. (n.d.). Download seamless naive floral pattern, stylized hand drawn flowers for digital paper, Home Decor For Free. Vecteezy. <https://www.vecteezy.com/vector-art/66868333-seamless-naive-floral-pattern-stylized-hand-drawn-flowers-for-digital-paper-home-decor>

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Dr. Elisha Stanley for her guidance and support throughout this project in APP-160 CRF01: Sewn Product Analysis.