





# Inspired by Art

Designers interpret masterpieces  
as sheath dresses | BY JUDITH NEUKAM

Fashion design is an art, and designers' creativity expands when they look to other art forms as inspiration. *Threads* challenged the members of the Association of Sewing and Design Professionals (ASDP) to find garment inspiration from any art, such as music, painting, sculpture, architecture, or poetry, for our 2015 design competition. The canvas for their interpretation was to be a sheath dress. We asked that the designers use seams, silhouette, texture, and construction techniques, not just surface embellishment, to communicate their vision. The winners were chosen on the basis of originality and quality of construction.

*Threads* presented the first design challenge to the ASDP 15 years ago. Each new challenge is presented as soon as the winners of the previous year are announced. The talented designers are guided in the process by a coordinator within ASDP. This year, Terri Tipps ably and graciously helped the designers manage their time and served as a liaison for the contestants, *Threads*, and the judges, so the makers' identities remained undisclosed during judging.

From 40 entries, 20 finalists were chosen by three judges: Susan Khalje, couture sewing instructor and *Threads* contributing editor; Patricia Robison, last year's Best Overall winner; and Judith Neukam, a *Threads* contributing editor. It is our pleasure to present the 2015 challenge winners. To find out more about the ASDP, visit [SewingProfessionals.org](http://SewingProfessionals.org).

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*Judith Neukam and her two giant cats inhabit a newly remodeled home and studio in Omaha, Nebraska.*

**web extra**

Find links to view the designers' art inspirations at [ThreadsMagazine.com](http://ThreadsMagazine.com).



Creative details emerge when sewers look to works of art for inspiration. To see the garments, turn the page.



## Best Overall:

### Tricia Crockett, Fractured Cranes

The idea for this dress was born when Tricia of Damascus, Oregon, visited The Art Institute of Chicago and admired the fascinating work of German painter Gerhard Richter.

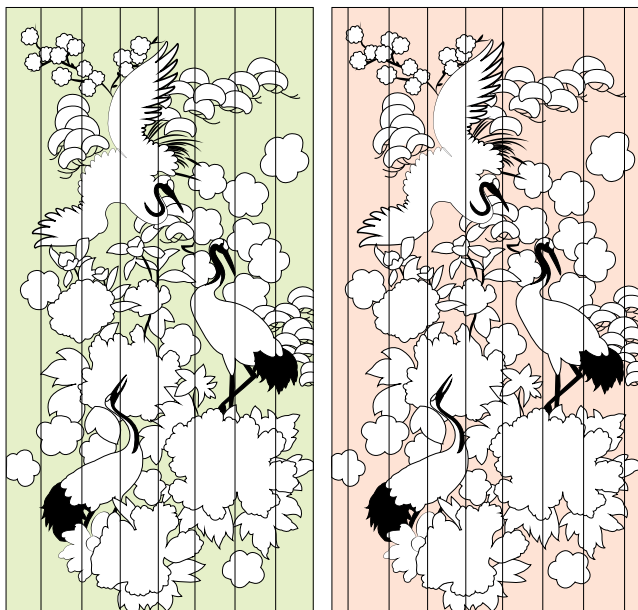
His technique involved creating an oil painting based on a photograph, and running a brush through the image while the paint was still wet. Tricia loved the blurred, striated look of his work. She remembered a “fractured” piecing technique and decided to construct a textile for her sheath dress using this method.

Tricia received a BabyLock Katherine sewing machine (MSRP \$1,799.99), as well as an honorarium from *Threads*.

*The designer spliced two identical panels to create a fractured print.*



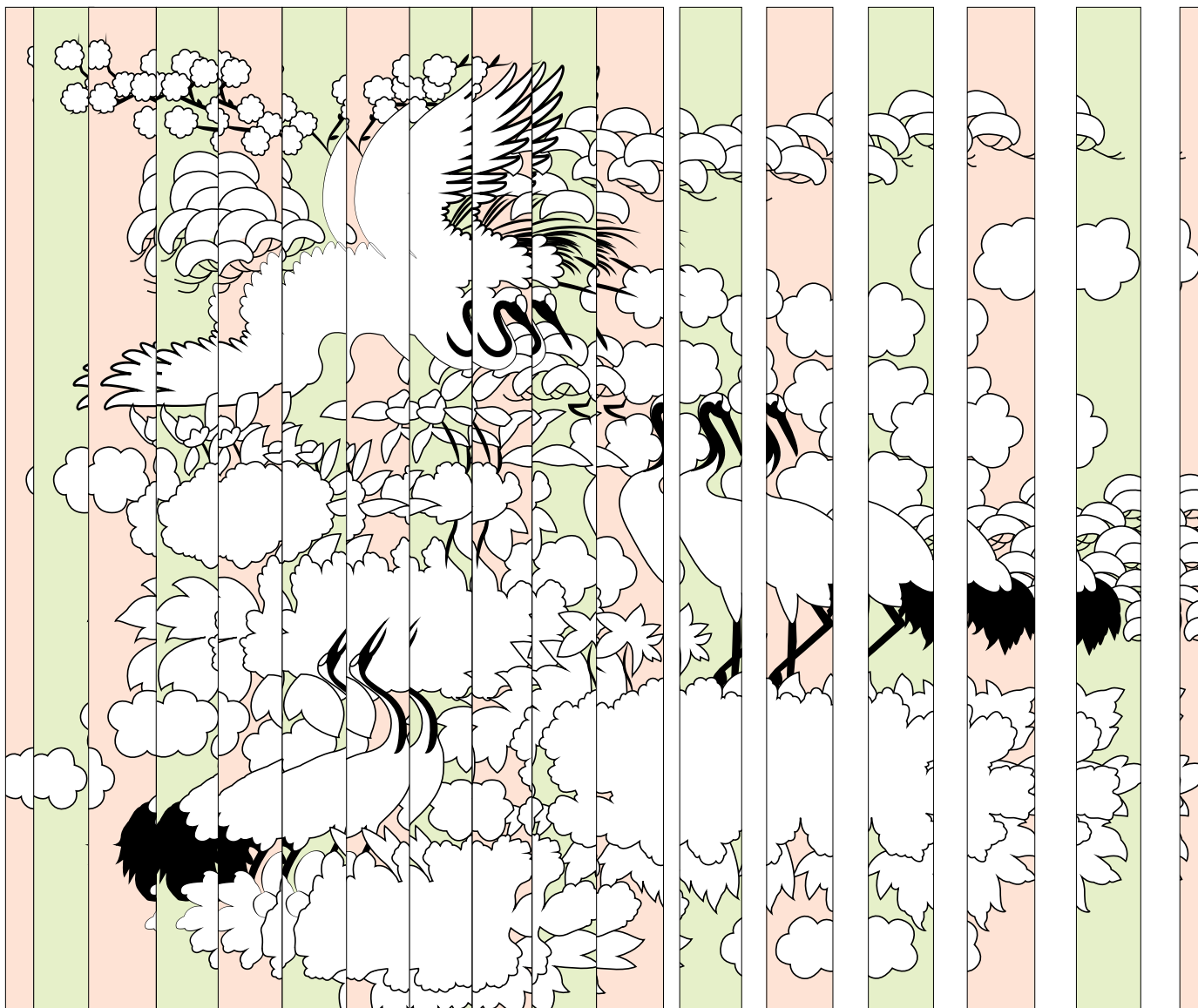
*Offset motif sections add movement to a large-scale print.*



### Notable features

- Tricia cut 2-inch-wide strips from two identical fabric panels, dividing each panel vertically in different places. She sewed the resulting strips together, alternating from one panel to the other, and using a 1/4-inch-wide seam allowance. The technique resulted in a new, wider panel.
- The dress was cut from the finished, “fractured” panel, taking advantage of attractive design placement.
- Tricia shifted the dress’s vertical shaping darts to align with strip seams, and thus avoided making darts within the narrow strips.

*After cutting two panels into strips, the designer created a new fabric with an expanded version of the print.*







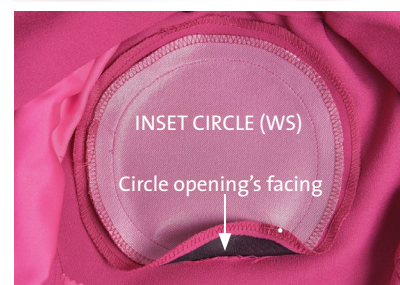
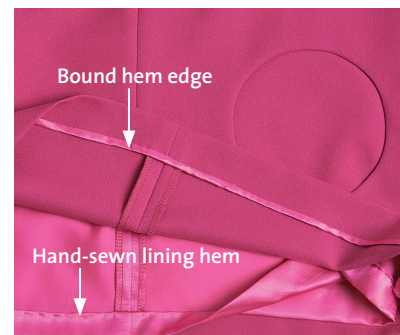
*Curved seamlines and circular insets define this chic, vibrant sheath dress.*

## Best Construction:

### Susan Widawski, Harmony

Gaining acceptance for being different is the theme of the 1967 film *To Sir With Love*. At that time, youth rebellion challenged the established way of life and fashion changed radically, through the emergence of synthetic fabrics, Op-art clothing, acid colors, space-age style, and pop-art fashions. Drawing inspiration from British pop culture, Susan, who lives in Belleville, Michigan, interpreted the iconic elements of the 1960s sleeveless sheath dress with geometric features and a sculptural fit.

The circular insets in Susan's design were inspired by the plastic disk earrings that the character Lulu wore in the movie. The crisp polyester fabric adds definition to the tone-on-tone circle insets and seams. Varied circle sizes and asymmetrical placement enhance a sense of pattern movement. The high-voltage pink puts a fresh, contemporary perspective on a classic silhouette.



#### Notable features

- This original design was created using the flat pattern method.
- The right bust dart was incorporated into the curved seam near the armhole.
- A crisp polyester crepe fabric was used with polyester satin lining.
- The circular insets were sewn into faced openings.
- An all-in-one facing finishes the neckline and armholes.
- Seam allowances throughout were pressed away from the curved areas' centers, to define the shapes with a raised edge.
- The hem edge was wrapped with bias tape made from lining fabric and was hand sewn.



## Most Creative Interpretation:

### Barbie McCormick, Monet's Water Lilies

Barbie McCormick of Nampa, Idaho, loves the serene and relaxing feelings evoked by Claude Monet's *Water Lilies* series. She set forth to make a dress with simple lines but intriguing layers, reminiscent of the painter's images. She accomplished this by layering printed and sheer fabrics to create a rippling, waterlike effect. Silk charmeuse bias binding at the neckline and armholes repeats the imagery of the Japanese bridge featured in the inspiration paintings. French darts add subtle shaping without overfitting the chiffon. The result is a soft, floaty dress that captures the subtle color variations of Monet's famous canvases.

#### Notable features

- Three layers of silk combine to create the painterly effect: an underlayer of boldly printed charmeuse, wrong side facing out; a pieced chiffon layer, combining light aqua with an inset swirl of pink; and a top layer of iridescent blue-green chiffon.
- French seams were sewn at the side seams.
- Charmeuse bias binding trims the neckline and armholes and provides a frame for the flowing silk layers.
- The dress has no closure, keeping it wonderfully light and airy.



*The artful layering of silks results in a soft, painterly look that resembles Monet's paintings.*



## Most Successful Adaptation:

### Debby Spence, Matisse Cutouts

Debby of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, was drawn to the colors and shapes in the Henri Matisse cutout *La Vis*, and chose it as the inspiration for her sheath dress. Matisse created his cutouts by painting paper and then cutting and collaging shapes. Since his colors and shapes coordinated perfectly, Debby realized that this garment needed to be a fairly literal interpretation of the original piece. The challenges were to add texture to his two-dimensional art, acquire fabrics in appropriate colors and a variety of textures, and place the shapes so they worked coherently and attractively on the body.

Debby made the dress sleeveless to reflect the rectangular shape of the artwork and used zigzag motifs from the original to outline the armholes. The layout of the design goes up the front of the dress and down the back with some design elements altered to take three-dimensional form. Most of the shaping is incorporated into seamlines.

*The colorful paper collage inspiration translates into eye-catching color blocking, piecing, and appliqué on a sheath dress.*

#### Notable features

- The fabrics include silk dupioni, silk taffeta, silk iridescent taffeta, silk satin, a silk/wool blend, and one synthetic blend chosen for color to duplicate the original palette.
- Some motifs were hand-appliquéd and others were pieced.
- A stitched-down tuck technique was used on the right front iridescent silk inset. Pressed pleats add texture to the yellow front inset.
- Some panels are embellished with decorative stitching and beading.
- Batting supports the black, three-dimensional insets on the hem band.
- Pieced sections were underlined with silk organza.
- An Ambiance lining was inserted by hand.



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tablet exclusive



Photos: (p. 60, left; p. 62, left; p. 63, left; pp. 64-65) Jack Deutsch; all others, Mike Yamin. Illustrations: Rosann Berry and Abigail Lupoff. Stylist: Jessica Saal. Hair and makeup: Agata Helena.com. Styling credits: (p. 60) earrings—Kate Spade (Nordstrom Rack), necklace—HM.com, clutch—Lulu Townsend (DSW.com), shoes—Chinese Laundry (DSW.com); (p. 62) earrings—INC International Concepts (Macys.com), bracelet—stylist's own, shoes—BCBG (Nordstrom Rack); (p. 63) earrings and bracelet—INC International Concepts (Macys.com), shoes—Sam Edelman (DSW.com); (p. 65) earrings—A gento Vivo (Nordstrom Rack), bracelet—Bar III (Macys.com), clutch—Lulu Townsend (DSW.com), shoes—Charles David (Nordstrom Rack).

## Audience Choice:

### Linda McCoy, Luminous Lace

Linda from Oostburg, Wisconsin, used printed fabric and lace to reimagine the multifaceted look of sunlight shining through the stained-glass windows of the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. The complex, clearly defined lines and kaleidoscope of colors presented a challenge in creating a related garment: how to keep the dress simple, clean, and unfussy. She chose sewing techniques and fabric, to provide drama.

Linda achieved a spectacular stained-glass effect by layering black Venetian point lace over a multicolored underlay. The lace overlay was constructed using heirloom sewing techniques with  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-wide entredeux seam inserts. The sleeves were shaped from scalloped border lace and decorated with subtle beading. Delicate  $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch-wide lace trims the neckline. By rendering these dainty details in black, Linda took them from precious to sophisticated and exciting.

#### Notable features

- The dress overlay is black Venetian point lace fabric joined in panels by black entredeux lace insertion.
- The lace is centered symmetrically on the front panel, with a V-neckline detail.
- Beneath the lace is a printed cotton/silk blend fabric lined with crepe de Chine.
- The cap sleeves are embellished with beads to form miniature “windows.”
- The dress closes with a center-back zipper and includes a back vent.



*The brilliance of light through a stained-glass window is emulated by this pairing of multihued fabric and black lace.*