

Basic Detail Report

Button Yoke: Motherland II

Date

2020

Primary Maker

Beau McCall

Materials

Upcycled Levi's denim jacket; wood, glass, metal, plastic, and other assorted clothing buttons; brooch; medallion; ornament; and embroidery thread

Description

From the artist: "Since the late 1980s I have created wearable art using upcycled denim materials (predominantly Levi's) in the form of cuffs, shorts, vests, jackets, and most recently, yokes. I began using denim as my base after a period of trial and error that involved embellishing sweaters. I soon discovered that the wool knit material could not sustain the weight of my hand-sewed buttons. Hence, I came up with the idea of using denim, a durable and sustainable material that also has important connections to the Black experience in America. Indigo, an integral component of creating blue jeans, has a history that can be traced as far back as Ancient Egypt where archaeologists found one of the oldest preserved indigo-dyed textiles 4,500 years ago. Later on indigo became one of the slave trade's most valuable commodities. During enslavement, slave owners referred to raw denim as "Negro clothes." From then on throughout American history Black people have repurposed, remixed, and reimagined denim, helping to elevate it to its current status as one of America's most popular materials. My button works on denim pay tribute to this history of reclamation. During the pandemic, I began to add yokes to my button denim collection. With yokes, I cut away the jacket--removing the sleeves and the body of the garment. I am then left with armholes, chest pockets, and the yoke area which is a back panel and two front panels (left and right). The embellishment process began with an outline of the collar, pockets, and shoulder areas using black plastic glossy two-hole buttons (all the same size). The base layer consists of black plastic glossy four-hole buttons (all the same size). Simultaneously, while sewing the base layer I sew decorative buttons on top of the base. My goal is to cover as many gaps and spaces between the buttons as possible. Sometimes I place additional found objects alongside the buttons to further enhance the work and its narrative. Motherland II includes a vast array of buttons (some leftover from Sole Power) and a few fasteners such as hand-carved wooden elephant heads, glass African masks, metal gold pharaohs, a ceramic banana, a shell horn, metal lions, iridescent glass buttons, and a metal cowrie shell. On the left pocket is a brooch and on the right pocket is a medallion, both of which reference historical and fictional African tribal culture. I created a companion piece to this one titled, Motherland I (for my own private collection). Afterward, my partner and studio manager, Souleo, requested his own version which led to the creation of Motherland II. A past trip to Johannesburg inspired both pieces. It was my first time in the Motherland and I was amazed to see so many people of my culture and race in one place as the majority population. There was an

abundance of kindness, creativity, and history that I experienced during that trip. This yoke celebrates my African heritage as well as universal pop culture references that I found during my time in Johannesburg."

Dimensions

16 1/2 × 19 1/2 × 1/2 in. (41.9 × 49.5 × 1.3 cm); men's size small