GOTHIC VISUAL LANGUAGE: CREATIVE INSPIRATION FOR CONTEMPORARY COUTURE-INSPIRED DESIGN

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Abstract. This study examines the potential for translating the visual language of Gothic stained glass into couture-inspired fashion design. Based on an analysis of the visual elements characteristic of medieval stained glass-including geometric segmented structures, saturated color palettes, and light-gradient effects-the study develops a methodological framework for reproducing these characteristics on textile materials. The research methodology combines image analysis of representative Gothic structures, digital pattern design, sublimation printing on textiles, and a survey of 52 participants. The results show that viewers easily recognize Gothic features when contrasting color elements and segmented compositions are appropriately applied. At the same time, younger people tend to appreciate designs with creative interpretations that place a greater emphasis on light effects. The study contributes to the process of translating Gothic visual heritage into contemporary fashion design and confirms the feasibility of sublimation printing in simulating stained glass effects on soft materials.
Keywords. Gothic stained glass; visual language; light effects; geometric segmentation; couture-inspired fashion; heat-transfer printing; contemporary fashion design

1 INTRODUCTION

Gothic stained glass is one of the important visual achievements of medieval European art, flourishing alongside church architecture from the 12th to 14th centuries. The appearance of large-scale stained-glass windows and stone tracery frames increased the ability to admit light, creating the characteristic visual style of Gothic architecture [1], [2]. Thanks to saturated colours, clear geometric compositions and light effects that change throughout the day, Gothic stained glass became a visual language system rich in aesthetic and expressive value [3].

In recent years, the trend of exploiting historical visual heritage in fashion design has received increasing attention. Several studies have addressed the application of Gothic motifs and architectural structures to contemporary fashion [4]. However, most studies have focused only on geometric motifs or religious symbols. At the same time, research on the transformation of the light and colour effects of Gothic stained glass onto soft materials, such as fabric, remains limited, especially in the Vietnamese context.

From this gap, the study aimed to analyze the core visual elements of Gothic stained glass-including its segmented structure, distinctive color palette, and lighting effects-to translate them into couture-inspired fashion designs. The study combined archival analysis, visual deconstruction of iconic Gothic structures, experimental pattern creation, and sublimation printing techniques on textiles, along with audience feedback surveys, to assess the level of Gothic recognition and the aesthetic effectiveness of the designs.

The research results not only provide a systematic approach to exploiting the Gothic visual language in fashion design but also contribute to the expansion of the trend of applying artistic heritage to contemporary creation. This is also the basis for developing research directions and design practices that are grounded in historical visual values within the context of Vietnamese fashion.

1.1 Background - Inspired by Gothic Stained Glass Art

From the 12th to the 15th century, Gothic stained glass art evolved beyond its decorative role to become a means of conveying emotions, faith, and theological ideas through the manipulation of light. The starting point can be mentioned as the Saint-Denis Cathedral (France), where Abbot Suger gave birth to the concept of “lux nova” (new light) - a sacred symbol of divine presence. He believed that light passing through stained glass was a means to guide the human mind beyond material constraints and approach divine truth [5].

Next, Chartres Cathedral (1194 - 220) thoroughly developed the concept of “lux continua” - endless light, through a system of massive stained glass windows, especially the characteristic blue color “Chartres

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Blue". The stained glass system here is designed to change its hue according to the time of day, from bright blue in the morning to warm yellow in the evening, creating a continuous visual and emotional journey. [6].

At Sainte-Chapelle (Paris), the Rayonnant style reaches its peak with 15 glass windows spanning 15 meters in height, depicting over 1,100 biblical scenes. The light passing through these glass panels creates a moving kaleidoscope effect, making the interior space lively and sacred [7].

Not only did Gothic stained glass illustrate the Bible, but it also served as a means of spiritual expression. Nicuţă (2021) emphasizes that the light passing through the glass carries a transformative energy - helping to transform the viewer's soul from the material realm to a state of sacred contemplation [8]. This effect is reinforced by sophisticated material techniques such as silver plating, cobalt oxide, and the use of glass with pigments that change light according to viewing angle [9].

These sacred visual experiences not only influenced the architectural spaces of churches but also paved the way for the reinterpretation of light effects in contemporary Art, particularly in fashion design, where light, color, and symbolism continue to be interpreted and recreated in innovative forms.

1.2 Research Problem

How can sublimation printing - traditionally used for applications - achieve a visual effect similar to stained glass for Couture-inspired designs?

Is it possible to maintain artistry, emotion, and craftsmanship when applying digital technology, such as thermal printing?

1.3 Research Objectives

- Recreate light effects, color tones, and Gothic symbols through sublimation printing on suitable materials.
- Create a mini collection with a Couture-Inspired spirit: handmade shapes, sophisticated prints, a Gothic color palette.
- Survey of visual and emotional experiences from the viewer/expert side.

1.4 The Urgency of The Topic

Although Gothic stained glass art has been widely exploited in various design fields worldwide, in Vietnam, there are still very few research projects that apply this characteristic system of symbols and aesthetics to modern fashion design. Therefore, studying and exploiting Gothic stained glass as a specific visual language to develop a local design language is a necessary and promising direction.

2 THEORETICAL BASIS

2.1 The Concept and Role of Gothic Stained Glass in The Visual Arts

Gothic stained glass is a traditional art form in medieval European church architecture, created from stained glass panels within a stone frame system, to construct visual images that convey religious stories and ideas. According to Kemp [10], stained glass is often considered "the Bible for the poor", helping the illiterate community of believers access biblical allusions through evocative images. Besides the storytelling function, stained glass windows also form a system of visual symbols, in which colors, compositions, and images are intentionally organized to convey doctrinal messages and orient religious awareness [11].

In Gothic architecture, stained glass is often associated with the development of stone tracery-a thin, delicate stone frame structure-that helps expand the window area and increase ventilation in interior spaces. The combination of architectural structure and stained glass contributes to shaping the visual characteristics of Gothic, creating facades rich in aesthetic depth and capable of attracting the attention of viewers [3], [2]. Many studies also show that stained glass not only has visual value but also reflects the cultural identity and status of the sponsoring community, expressing the social and religious imprint of the Middle Ages [12].

Overall, Gothic stained glass serves as an essential visual communication system of church architecture, combining narrative, iconographic, and spatial organization functions, and laying the foundation for the exploitation of these visual values in contemporary creative fields.



Figure 1. Stone tracery and panel structure in Gothic stained glass [13]

2.2 Geometric Structure and Symmetry in Gothic Stained Glass

Geometric structures are key to the grandeur and visual character of Gothic stained glass. Rather than being mere decorative frames, elements such as concentric circles, triangles, and polygons all carry profound theological implications. One of the typical visual symbols is the rose window, which is often arranged concentrically according to the principle of "ad quadratum" - the practical application of squares and circles in medieval architecture [14]. Studies have shown that the rose windows on the West, North, and South facades of Chartres Cathedral are divided into 12 sections, symbolizing the 12 apostles, 12 months of the year, and 12 heavens - symbolic numbers in the Bible [1].

Wu's (2002) work offers an in-depth analysis of how primitive geometries, such as square grids, concentric circles, the golden ratio, and the laws of symmetry, were employed by Gothic artisans to achieve harmony and sacredness in design [14]. This is reinforced by Samper and Herrera's (2015) mathematical analysis of the roughness of the asterisk curves, demonstrating that even the decorative details follow a controlled geometric principle [15].

In addition, the tracery system - the patterned stone frame at the top of the glass door - is a testament to the fusion of technique and Art. Tracery not only supports the stained glass but also creates visual depth. Bork (2014) notes that Gothic artists frequently employ the method of "unfolding"-expanding and rotating the geometry of basic modules-to create dynamic and rhythmic compositions [16].

In particular, in large rosettes, motifs such as the trefoil, quatrefoil, or hexafoil often appear, symbolizing the Trinity, Christian virtues, or the cycle of reincarnation. According to the article "Hexafoil" on Wikipedia (2025), the six-petal pattern (hexafoil) is also a symbol of peace and eternity, often placed in the center of the glass door as an "eye" of sacred light [17].

Through this, it can be affirmed that Gothic stained glass is not only a work of Art but also a system of symbolic geometry, where each line and motif serves a profound visual-theological message.

2.3 Color and Light Effects in Gothic Stained Glass

Color and light are the two core technical elements that create the characteristic visual effects of Gothic stained glass. Medieval artisans employed various manufacturing methods to regulate the intensity, hue, and light transmission of color. One of the essential techniques is flashing, which involves applying a thin layer of color to the glass surface to adjust the lightness and darkness and create visual depth. Additionally, the silver stain technique utilizes silver compounds to produce a characteristic yellow color, which contributes to the formation of prominent bright areas and enhances the overall contrast of the glass [18].

At Chartres Cathedral, the cobalt dyeing technique creates a highly saturated and light-catching "Chartres Blue", which has become one of the signature colors of Gothic architecture [19]. The combination

of color layers, material thickness, and light scattering enables the stained glass to create a color-shifting effect, varying from deep blue tones to warm yellow-red tones, and thus giving a sense of continuous visual change [20].

Modern research reveals that colors in stained glass not only possess aesthetic characteristics but also have a profound impact on visual perception. Experiments by Schilling et al. demonstrate that red light can activate LPP potential amplitudes more strongly than neutral colors, suggesting the ability to create strong emotional responses in viewers [21]. Analysis based on the Munsell color system also reveals that color saturation and brightness have a significant impact on the visual experience: warm colors often evoke a sense of dynamism. At the same time, blue-violet creates a calm and profound impression [22]. Research on color-combination emotion models contributes to the evidence that emotional responses to colors are consistent across different groups of people, suggesting that color serves as a structured tool for emotional communication [23].

Symbolically, many colors in stained glass have meanings that are tied to the medieval context, such as red for sacrifice, blue for protection, or yellow for brilliance and sacredness [24]. However, in this section, the symbolic value only plays a fundamental role; the focus is on how the crafting techniques and the interaction between light and materials that create visual effects can be effectively translated into fashion design through modern printing and surface treatment technologies.

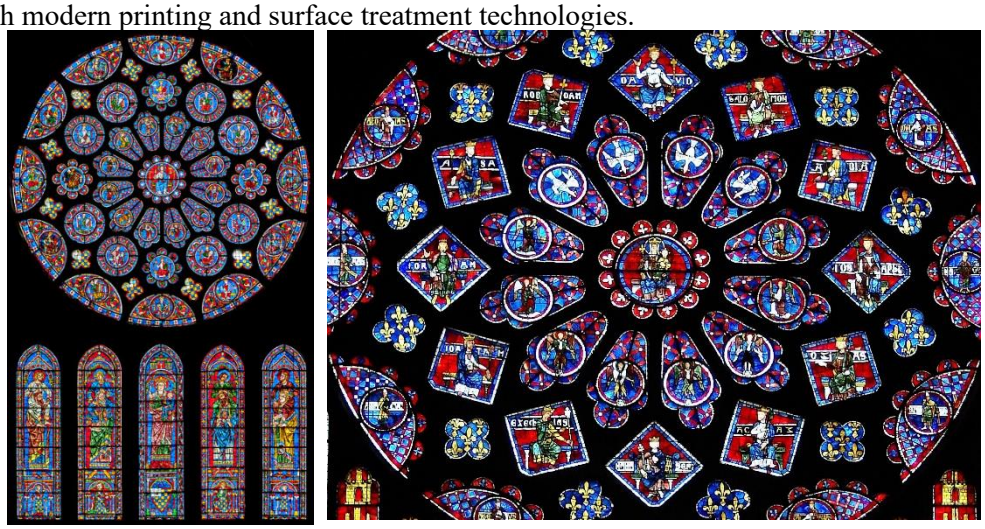


Figure 2. Representative color palette of Gothic stained-glass windows, illustrating characteristic hues such as Chartres Blue, red-gold highlights, and violet-blue tonal ranges [25, 26]



(a) (b) (c)

Figure 3. Light-color transformation effects produced by Sunlight passing through Gothic stained-glass windows: (a) multicolored beams projected onto interior surfaces; (b) high-contrast chromatic diffusion within tall lancet

windows; (c) radiating hues generated by rose-window compositions [27, 28, 29]

2.4 Applications in Fashion Design

The visual language of Gothic stained glass, characterized by its fragmented structure, symmetrical motifs, and rich symbolism, has become a significant source of inspiration for contemporary fashion design. Recent studies have shown that many of the visual elements characteristic of Gothic architecture-such as rosettes, tracery, sculptural motifs, and religious symbols-are translated into patterns, lines, and decorative details in modern clothing and accessories. Trykolenko and Yelisieiev [4] assert that the integration of these motifs not only recreates the medieval visual heritage but also expands the creative possibilities in design.

The influence of the Gothic on fashion extends beyond motifs. Spooner [30] notes that contemporary Gothic fashion is heavily influenced by the shapes and forms of Gothic architecture, with elements such as high collars, upright silhouettes, and corsets framing the silhouette. These features reflect the combination of Gothic beauty and drama. Wilson [31] notes that the Gothic aesthetic in fashion is associated with emotional intensity and symbolism, much like the visual experience of viewing light through stained glass.

The color palette of the modern Gothic style also maintains its connection to medieval stained glass. Black, deep purple, burgundy, and navy blue are often used as visual markers, recalling the rich, symbolic palette of church stained glass. MagicWardrobes [32] points out that the combination of dark tones, strong contrasts, and symmetrical patterns helps create a minimalist Gothic style that still retains aesthetic depth.

In addition to direct reproduction, many designers choose to “reinterpret” the Gothic language through modern materials and techniques. Haq and Fitri [33] demonstrate that materials such as synthetic leather, raw fabrics, or hand-painted techniques can simulate the Gothic spirit without replicating the original, while meeting the visual needs of contemporary consumers.

However, the widespread popularity of the Gothic style also leads to challenges in preserving cultural depth. Gothic Charm School [34] warns that excessive commercialization can cause Gothic to be reduced to a market style, losing its inherent symbolic value and artistic depth. However, studies show that the visual language of Gothic stained glass continues to play a significant role in shaping the contemporary Gothic style, serving as a rich source of inspiration that is also adaptable for fashion creation.

3 RESEARCH AND EXPERIMENTAL METHODS

The study uses a combined qualitative-quantitative and innovative experimental approach, implemented through three main components.

3.1 Document research and image analysis:

Academic literature on Gothic stained glass, geometric symmetry, sacred colors, and lighting effects was compiled to build a theoretical foundation. In parallel, the team conducted a visual analysis of representative stained glass windows at Chartres, Saint-Denis, and Sainte-Chapelle to extract visual elements (structures, motifs, tones, symbols) that could be translated into fashion design.

3.2 Experimental design of three costumes:

Based on the theory of Gothic visual language and the image data system analyzed in the previous stage, the research team experimentally designed three illustrative costumes: The Divine Icon, Visual Gospel, and Lux Nova. The design process was carried out using specialized software, such as Adobe Illustrator and CLO3D, to create a digital file set that included pattern layouts, color gradients, vector layers, and cutting diagrams. The designs were then sublimated onto three types of materials suitable for simulating the stained glass effect: organza, satin, and metallic fabric-materials that have good light-catching ability and clearly show the color transitions of the patterns when illuminated.

The three garments are constructed in different aesthetic directions. Still, all adhere to the common goal of translating the characteristic features of Gothic stained glass, such as sacred light (lux nova), symmetrical geometric structures, expressive color palettes, and visual storytelling language, into contemporary fashion forms. The Divine Icon emphasizes religious symbolism with angelic images inspired by Tiffany glass and the stained glass windows of Chartres Cathedral; the square neckline and long, flared sleeves are reinterpreted from 12th-century aristocratic costumes to evoke the spirit of medieval royalty. The Visual Gospel is designed with a visual narrative structure based on the principles of Biblia Pauperum, utilizing

motifs of the Virgin Mary, lilies, and doves, combined with pleated layers that simulate the fragmented composition of stained glass. The color palette of Chartres Blue and gold enhances the sacredness and visual contrast. Finally, the Lux Nova model recreates the characteristic moving light effect of the Sainte-Chapelle glass windows using metallic materials and silver tulle, creating a change in tone according to the body's movements. The puffed sleeves and fractal-gargoyle motifs convey the postmodern Gothic spirit and evoke strong visual emotions.

All finished samples were photographed in a studio environment with a Gothic interior simulation to ensure the accuracy of lighting and color effects. These finished images were then used as input material for a survey and qualitative feedback from experts, focusing on three main criteria groups: visual effects (color, light, composition), aesthetic emotions, and the ability to apply them in fashion design for shows or the Couture-Inspired line.

3.3 Online survey of 52 people (7 experts, 45 students):

The survey was conducted via Google Form and consisted of two parts:

(i) Quantitative assessment on a 5-point Likert scale of visual effectiveness, Gothic symbolism, aesthetic appeal, creativity, and applicability;

(ii) Qualitative comments on feelings, strengths, and suggestions for improvement.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and content analysis to identify trends in evaluation and assess the suitability of each design.

The combination of the above three methods enables the verification of the feasibility of translating Gothic visual language into fashion design, while ensuring the objectivity and reliability of the research conclusions.



(d) (e) (f)

Figure 4. Three designs developed from Gothic stained glass inspiration: (d) The Divine Icon, (e) Visual Gospel, (f) Lux Nova

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Quantitative survey results

The survey was conducted with 52 participants, including seven professionals and 45 students majoring in Fashion Design. Six criteria were measured using a 5-point Likert scale.

Sample No. 1 - The Divine Icon:

Criteria	% Agree + Strongly Agree
Visual effects	84.6%
Layout & shape	80.7%
Gothic symbols	67%
Aesthetic feelings	80.7%
Creative – new	80.7%
Applicability	69.2%

Comments: Sample 1 scored consistently high, especially in visual effects and aesthetic emotions, demonstrating the ability to successfully simulate stained glass characteristics such as segmentation, color contrast, and symmetrical composition.

Sample 2 - Visual Gospel:

Criteria	% Agree + Strongly Agree
Visual effects	69.2%
Layout & shape	73.0%
Gothic symbols	73.0%
Aesthetic feelings	67.3%
Creative – new	57.6%
Applicability	65.3%

Comment: Model 2 maintains stability, with a good level of Gothic recognition, but a lower level of creativity compared to models 1 and 3. This reflects the compromise between Gothic symbolism and application in clothing.

Model No. 3 - Lux Nova :

Sample number 3 is rated high on creativity but lower on Gothic symbolism:

Criteria	% Agree + Strongly Agree
Visual effects	75.0%
Layout & shape	71.2 %
Gothic symbols	50.0 %
Aesthetic feelings	61.5%
Creative – new	71.2%
Applicability	63.5%

Comments: The Model 3 is considered outstanding in terms of creativity and visual effects, clearly demonstrating a contemporary approach to Gothic with flexible shapes and a sense of light movement. However, the level of recognition of Gothic symbols is lower than that of the other two models, because the design prioritizes formal interpretation over direct depiction of traditional motifs. Overall, Lux Nova creates a strong impression of innovation, but lacks convincing symbolic depth and application in costumes.

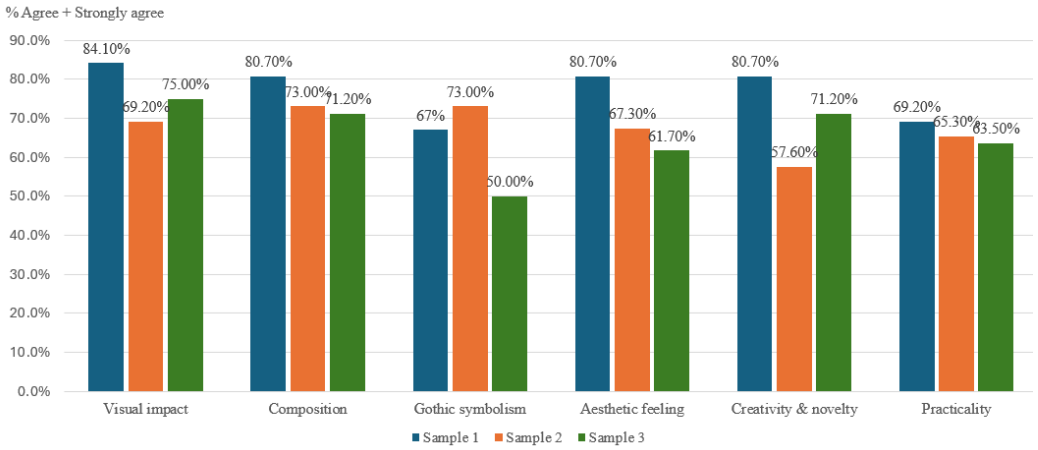


Figure 5. Survey results for the three design prototypes across six criteria

4.2 Qualitative Survey Results

Analysis of the 52 open-ended responses revealed the following striking trends:

Impression level:

- The Divine Icon: most mentioned (52% of responses) - "elegant, powerful, clear symbol".
- Lux Nova: ≈ 30% of responses - "modern, innovative, beautiful lighting effects".
- Visual Gospel: ≈ 18% of responses - "youthful, balanced".

Gothic Identity:

Analysis of the responses revealed three main trends:

- Clear icons - especially on model 1
  - The angelic image, red and yellow tones, and solemn composition are considered "in the true Gothic spirit".
- Modern Gothic - in models 2 and 3
  - Many people think that these two models have a mixed Gothic style, impressive in fashion, but lack the religious depth of model 1.
- Some criticisms
  - Some comments said that the printed images were sometimes "too bright",
  - Or, the Model 3 lacks the traditional Gothic tones (black, blue, purple).

Suggestions for improving the design:

The main groups of opinions include:

- Some comments suggest that the red in Model 1 is too bright.
- Model 3 has a modern shape but lacks the traditional Gothic color scheme.
- Suggested improvements include simplifying patterns, reducing puffy sleeves, choosing softer materials, and incorporating blue, purple, and turquoise tones to enhance Gotham's depth.

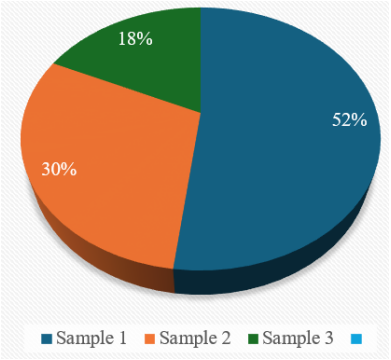


Figure 6. Percentage of participants choosing the most impressive design.

4.3 Discussion and Comparison with Previous Studies

The survey results are consistent with Keerthi's [35] conclusion that the fragmented composition and saturated colors of stained glass create a strong impression in fashion design. Sample 1 was highly rated on these elements, indicating an adequate level of transformation.

The study by Tan & Choy [36], which emphasized the effect of color and light contrast in transferring glasswork patterns to other materials, also coincided with the positive feedback for sample 3. This sample focused on simulating the movement of light [37]. An overview of stained glass shows the potential for design applications when combined with technology. The sublimation printing technique in our study reaffirms this trend by simulating the stained glass effect on soft fabrics.

Compared to Trykolenko [4], today's young viewers are more interested in creativity and fashion than religious depth, as shown by model 3, who is rated as the most creative, although weaker in Gothic identification. This is a notable difference, indicating that Gothic fashion is shifting away from traditional stereotypes towards more flexible, contemporary interpretations.

4.4 Research Significance

From the above results, some main implications can be drawn:

- The core elements of Gothic stained glass-geometric fragmentation, color contrast, light effects-can be effectively translated into fashion design when handled with the proper techniques and materials.
- Young viewers tend to perceive Gothic through color, light, and creativity, rather than through the original religious symbol system; this opens up a direction for contemporary Gothic development to suit new tastes.
- Simulating stained glass light on fabric using the sublimation printing technique brings practical value, expanding the application of Gothic in couture-inspired design and fashion shows.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The study developed and tested a process for translating the visual language of Gothic stained glass into fashion design through image analysis, visual element extraction, and textile sublimation experiments. The results showed that viewers clearly recognized the visual characteristics of Gothic-particularly the effects of fragmentation, color contrast, and symmetrical composition-when these elements were translated into clothing. At the same time, the positive responses to the creative and light-simulation designs demonstrate the potential of reinterpreting Gothic using modern techniques.

The difference in how young people perceive Gothic, which is more visual and creative than religious, opens up a new approach to applying artistic heritage to contemporary fashion. This is consistent with the trend of interdisciplinary research between art, technology, and design, suggesting the possibility of expanding the way Gothic stained glass is exploited in the future.

Academically, the study contributes an analytical and application model that can be reused for other heritage materials when translated into fashion design. Practically, the results confirm the suitability of sublimation printing techniques in simulating the complex visual effects of stained glass on soft materials, opening up the potential for couture-inspired designs or performance costumes.

In the future, expanding the scope of the survey to a more diverse consumer group, along with testing additional surface treatment techniques such as metallic embroidery, laser cutting, or metal coating, will help to perfect further the ability to recreate the light effects and aesthetic depth of Gothic on costumes.

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NGÔN NGỮ THỊ GIÁC GOTHIC: CẢM HỨNG SÁNG TẠO CHO THIẾT KẾ COUTURE - INSPIRED ĐƯƠNG ĐẠI

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Tóm tắt. Nghiên cứu này khám phá khả năng chuyển hóa ngôn ngữ thị giác của tranh kính Gothic vào thiết kế thời trang theo định hướng couture-inspired. Dựa trên phân tích các yếu tố thị giác đặc trưng của tranh kính Trung cổ-gồm cấu trúc phân mảng hình học, bảng màu bão hòa và hiệu ứng chuyển sắc theo ánh sáng-nghiên cứu xây dựng một khung phương pháp nhằm tái hiện các đặc tính này trên chất liệu vải. Phương pháp nghiên cứu kết hợp phân tích hình ảnh các công trình Gothic tiêu biểu, thiết kế họa tiết bằng công nghệ số, in chuyển nhiệt trên vải và khảo sát đánh giá của 52 người tham gia. Kết quả cho thấy người xem dễ dàng nhận diện đặc trưng Gothic khi các yếu tố màu sắc tương phản và bố cục phân mảng được ứng dụng hợp lý; trong khi các thiết kế mang tính diễn giải sáng tạo, nhấn mạnh hiệu ứng ánh sáng, được nhóm người trẻ đánh giá cao hơn. Nghiên cứu đóng góp quy trình chuyển hóa di sản thị giác Gothic vào thiết kế thời trang đương đại và khẳng định tính khả thi của kỹ thuật in chuyển nhiệt trong việc mô phỏng hiệu ứng kính màu trên chất liệu mềm.

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