



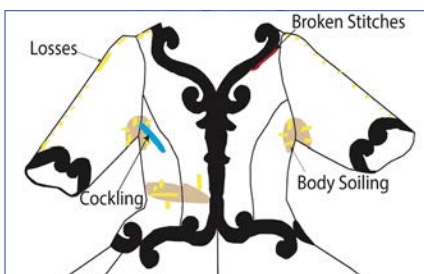
Art Conservation *and historical influence*

*In 1656, a small girl in a sumptuous court mantua gown with a fitted waist and an exaggerated pannier (a wide skirt support used in the 17th and 18th centuries) posed for the great Spanish painter Diego Velázquez (1599-1660). Almost three centuries later, these paintings of the young Infanta Margaret Theresa (1651-1673) and her gown inspired another great Spanish artist, the couturier Cristobal Balenciaga (1895-1972), to create *Infanta*.*

Considered one of the most iconic designs of his early career, the floor-length, full-skirted gown is made of ivory silk faille with black curvilinear cotton velveteen appliques at the neckline and waistline. The original house model wore the gown with a pannier and hairstyle reminiscent of the 17th-century princess. Balenciaga showed the dress in 1939, two years after he fled to Paris from the Spanish Civil War in his native country.

One version of *Infanta* belongs to Drexel University's Robert and Penny Fox Historic Costume Collection in Philadelphia and was treated by WUDPAC Fellow Margaret O'Neil. A textiles major with a preventive minor and a special interest in historical dress, Margaret found the dress to be in fragile condition. She focused her treatment on addressing perspiration stains in the underarms and the active silk shattering throughout the gown caused by what appeared to be weighted silk wefts in the woven fabric. Her goal was to clean and stabilize the dress so that it could be safely stored, exhibited, and used by researchers.

Margaret cleaned the underarms in eight sections: back bodice, back sleeve, front bodice, and front sleeve, both right and left. After removing the dress shields, she used an agarose gel soaked in pH-adjusted water, cyclododecane to create a liquid barrier, distilled water to rinse, a suction platen to further control moisture, and blotters to reduce the visual appearance of the stains. To address the losses throughout the silk, she created a lining made of an adhesive-coated, undyed silk crepe, activated with acetone, for the bodice, sleeves, and small section of the skirt. She used a sparing amount of hairsilk stitches to hold the breaks in place. Before the dress is returned to Drexel, Margaret created a storage mount and dressed the gown on a custom mannequin for final photography. Meanwhile, she looks forward to a fascinating career working with and preserving historical dress.



ARTC Spotlight—April 2022

The University of Delaware's Art Conservation Department educates and trains professional conservators who are well versed in the treatment, analysis, documentation, and preventive conservation of individual artifact and archive collections. For more news about our students and other department activities visit our web site at www.artcons.udel.edu.

Top: Detail of Infanta before treatment, front of bodice. Above: Infanta after treatment, overall front 3/4 view. Upper left: Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation Fellow Margaret O'Neil stitches the edges of the adhesive lining. Lower left: Condition map of Infanta bodice front. (Images: M. O'Neil and A. Rileybird.)