

# The application of traditional elements of a leather vest from the Croatia area in a contemporary collection of women's clothing

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## Abstract

The collection of women's clothing presented in the paper is inspired by the leather elements of the ethno men's and women's folk costumes of Slavonia. Due to the richness and variety of costumes, one leather element from the leather coat (kožuh) has been singled out, which has been developed in a new way and applied in a contemporary clothing collection. A lot of attention has been paid to handmade workmanship and quality, so this collection also has high fashion features. In the art part, through sketches, the selected theme or element is elaborated. Models have been developed and places where and in what way leather elements and mirrors will be applied. The collection transforms the costume element into simple, refined garments, creating a contrast between the old and the new, tradition and modernity. It depicts the present, a contemporary collection created on the foundations of a rich past and tradition. The result is presented in the form of a realized fashion collection of women's clothing with leather ethno applications.

**Keywords:** leather elements, ethno, folk costume, contemporary fashion

## 1. Introduction

The rich cultural heritage of Croatia is enriched with traces of previous cultures and peoples who lived in its area. Cultural heritage is a collective good that belongs to the past, present and future. Folk costume is a traditional and historical clothing that exists within individual regions, states or members of a group. It mostly belongs to the cultural heritage. The costume is one of the outstanding means of expressing local, regional and ethnic affiliation. Nowadays, the costume isolated from the overall cultural and social context in which it originated, and in a completely changed environment, still radiates as a symbol of national identity [1, 2, 3].

Folk costume is a traditional style of clothing of the non-civilian population in pre-industrial times. It includes all clothing items (underwear, basic and outerwear) for everyday and festive occasions and for all seasons. Folk costume is characterized by mostly simple cut and use of natural materials. Furthermore, such clothing had longevity of form and was not subject to fashion trends.

The raw material used to make folk costumes was conditioned by what the natural environment of a particular area offers (flax, hemp, cotton, wool, silk, leather, fur, feathers, etc.), and this choice of material was also the most suitable for climatic conditions. The folk costume reflects the historical destiny and contacts with other cultures. The components of the costume emphasized the family and social position of the individual, age, vocation, etc. The ornamentation of the costume showed the former understanding of beauty. With the application of civilizational achievements and industrially produced materials, handicrafts disappear, and folk costumes gradually disappear from everyday use. Representative specimens of folk costumes are today kept in ethnographic museums and collections as documents of the material culture of past periods. Folk costume with its harmony of colors, richness of form and decorative sophistication has a high position in folk art and represents an authentic Croatian cultural asset [4, 5].

Considering the natural features of Croatian areas, climate and branches of the traditional economy, the national costume is divided into: clothing of Adriatic sailors and islanders - cut, shape and composition suitable for the mild Mediterranean climate; the pure opposite is the clothing of mountaineers that is heavy and warm to provide protection from the mountain cold. Due to the exposure of various neighboring cultures and the clothing of higher social strata, the costumes of Croatian peasants had a reflection of historical and artistic styles in their structure. For example, a Roman tunic is reflected in a shirt from the Dalmatian hinterland; in Istrian clothing Gothic; in an Adriatic blouse with white embroidery and sewn lace Renaissance; on Posavina vests and winter coats Baroque; in the Slavonian golden embroidery Rococo [4].

The paper emphasizes the parts of folk costumes that are made of leather. A mini collection of contemporary clothing inspired by ethno elements, especially leather vests of Croatian folk costumes, was made on the basis of leather clothing items or parts of clothing items. By elaborating the given theme, floral leather applications were created, which were applied to clothing items in a contemporary collection of five outfits.

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1. Materials

The created autumn / winter collection is inspired by the ethno-folk costume of Slavonia. The inspiration came from one of the many decorative techniques used in making the costume - richly decorated small vests, large winter coats. It uses mirrors and leather applications to give simple garments another dimension in texture. The collection is dominated by neutral tones, from light, cool gray, sandy gray, to warm nude, ending with dark gray. The materials used in the collection are polyester, silk, artificial leather, leather and mirror. Clothing can be combined with each other in several ways [3]. The resulting collection transforms the traditional elements of folk costumes into a contemporary collection of refined shapes and neutral colors. Inspired by tradition and the rich cultural heritage of Croatia, the collection becomes a blend of contemporary and traditional in a modern and contemporary way.

### 2.2. Selected folk costumes used for inspiration - Glass applications on garments

#### 2.2.1. Kožuščić

Kožuščić is the name for a short, small women's coat that makes the upper garment of the costume in winter. It is made sleeveless with a large front semicircular neckline and buttoning from the front on three large buttons, with the help of leather loops. There are two types of kožuščić: everyday and penitent. The penitent leather vest is less decorated. It was worn on penitential occasions or worn by the elderly. On the inside of the fur is the leather of a colorful white-brown fleece, and on the outside the leather is upholstered in black cloth. On the entire edge, the lower side is sewn with decorative leather in dark green. Wider belts are sewn along the center front, and two semicircular belts on the back. Everything is complemented by yellow-red leather ornaments and red or blue edging beads. Stylized flowers of the same dark green leather are applied on both sides of the kožuščić. (Fig. 1) [3, 6, 7].



**Fig. 1** Penitent leather vest: a) front part, b) back part, purlieu of Slavonki Brod [3]

The second leather vest is much richer in color and in most cases completely filled with colorful or monochrome stylized cut leather

applications, under which pieces of mirrors are placed. Its entire surface is filled with geometrized and floral ornaments (Figs. 2, 3) [3, 6, 7].

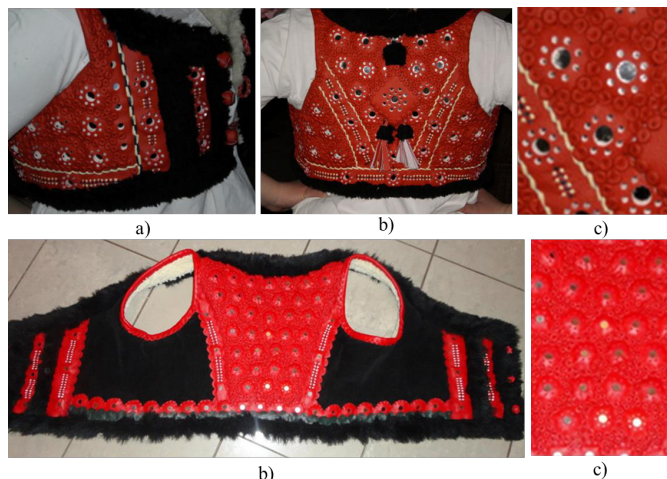


Fig. 2 Kožuh from Slavonki Brod: a) Front side, b) Back side, c) View of enlarged leather application with small mirrors [3]



Fig. 3 Kožuh from Retkovci: a) back side, b) representation of enlarged leather applications with small mirrors [3]

### 2.2.2. Men's pršnjak

Pršnjak is the name for a men's fur garment up to the waist, sleeveless. It is made of light brown leather, closed on the front and back, and is slightly circular in the entire lower part. The buckle is located on the left side with the help of loops and four leather buttons, and on the left shoulder with two buttons. A black and red leather belt supplemented with a blue-yellow braid was applied to the waist area. The entire front and lower semicircle are filled with rich leather applications of plant content: stylized branches, flowers and petals under which mirrors are inserted that create a more dazzling impression. Leather applications are in red, yellow, green, black and blue. There was white faux fur on the inside and faux black fur on the neck opening. This richly decorated breastplate was worn in the past by boys and younger married men for more formal occasions, over a home-woven shirt, with trousers (work underpants, thick-woven trousers, usually velvet), peasant shoes and a (obojak) piece of cloth wrapped around the foot substitute for socks, or boots (Fig. 4) [3, 7].

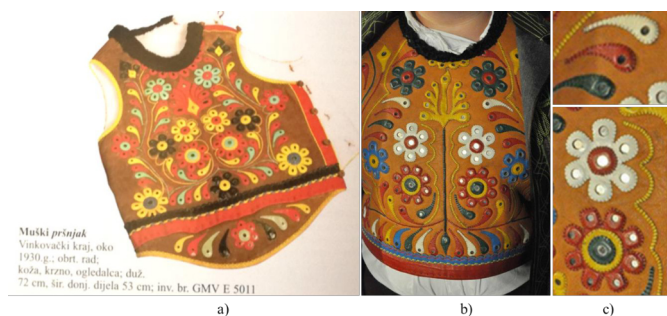


Fig. 4 Men's pršnjak a) Vinkovci, b) from private collection c) View of enlarged leather application with small mirrors [3]



Fig. 5 Variations of the pršnjak in the area of Slavonki Brod with a view of an enlarged leather application with small mirrors [3]

### 2.2.3. A large male decorated leather coat (kožuh)

A large leather coat was worn by men in winter on everyday and festive occasions; the younger more ornate, the older with less ornaments. The first leather coats were made of pure white leather without applications. The leather coat of recent times has dyed leather and is embellished. The leather is dyed light brown, and the surface of the coat itself is richly applied with pieces of skin in various colors - tirše (thin leather in color that is cut into very narrow straps to decorate clothes), lighter and darker green, yellow and purple with a predominance of red. Pieces of the mirror are inserted under the leather. The elements that are applied are stylized floral forms of flowers, branches, which in various combinations richly decorate the surfaces of the leather coat. On the back hangs a long thrum (an ornament of threads tied at the top and free at the bottom), a tassel on braided laces. It is about one hundred and ten centimeters long. It has two pockets on the front and closes with buttons with leather loops. The inside of the leather coat is made of sheepskin rack of sheep, which is used because of the length of the fleece. The edges are decorated with lamb fleece. Unlike men who wear a leather coat with sleeves in these areas, women wore exclusively a leather coat without sleeves (Fig. 6) [3, 7].



Fig. 6 Decorated leather coat: a) The back side of the coat, Komletinci; b) Front side of the coat, Private collection [3]

## 3. Experimental part

The first phase of making leather ethno applications involves experimenting with the material - leather. How the skin reacts to the techniques it goes through in order to obtain a leather application in accordance with the design, ie the finished appearance of the leather applications ready for sewing. This was followed by a study of the leather's response to heat exposure, stretching, shrinkage percentage, and dimensional change. It is necessary to obtain a leather application in good proportion with the garments, in order to avoid deformation in form and material. The dimensions of the applications are also determined based on the size of the mirrors whose diameter is 20 mm. Mirrors represent the first layer on which leather applications are then sewn. The mirrors were taken as a reference point according to which the first version of the stylized floral pattern applications was made. After the first perforated floral applications were made of the test material, two of thinner and thicker artificial leather, to determine the effect of cavities on the strength and shape of the material,



data on the ideal material thickness were obtained and the exact dimensions of the holes in the sample were determined. 7) [3].



Fig. 7 Perforated applications in test materials [3]

Based on the tests, the dimensions of the applications for smaller mirrors with a diameter of 20 mm were determined: the outer circle, ie the radius of the entire application is 36 mm; inner, central circle - pestle 5 mm; surrounding circles - petals 3 mm (Figs. 8, 9) [3].

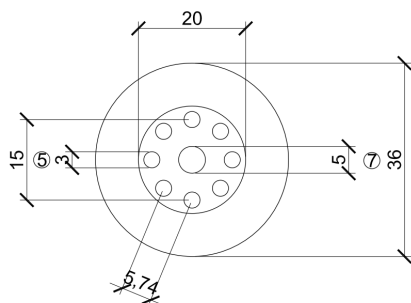


Fig. 8 Schematic representation of a smaller application with all measures [3]



Fig. 9 Mirrors and a finished smaller perforated application [3]

The dimensions of the perforated applications for larger hexagonal mirrors (page dimensions 20 mm) are: outer circle, ie application size 55 mm; inner, central circle 10 mm; surrounding circles - petals, 5 mm in diameter (Figs. 10, 11) [3].

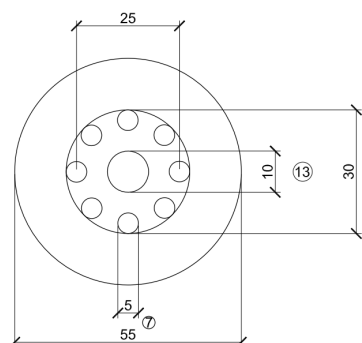


Fig. 10 Schematic representation of a larger application with all measures [3]

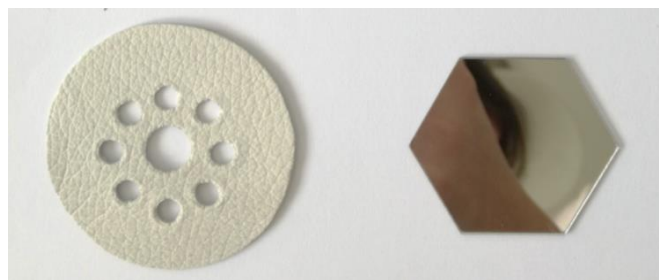


Fig. 11 Mirrors and a larger hole application [3]

The last dimension that needed to be determined were the small circular leather applications that come in the third layer, after the mirrors and perforated circular applications. They are sewn along the entire edge of the perforated leather applications. Before sewing, they undergo a process of heating, melting, whereby their original shape and dimensions change. The percentage change in shape and dimensions depends on the thickness and quality of leather tanning. The procedure is as follows: after drilling, circular pieces of leather are placed on an indirect heat source, causing shrinkage. Trial pieces of leather applications of different dimensions were used to calculate the percentage of shrinkage on the basis of which the measurements of the desired leather circles were obtained: cutting dimension 16 mm, which change after heating and shrinkage and their dimensions are 10-12 mm, depending on the thickness of leather (Fig. 12) [3].



Fig. 12 Leather circle before and after heating [3]

### 3.1. Development of leather applications

After the first phase in which the dimensions of leather applications are defined, the production follows. Considering the required large number of leather applications, tens of thousands, the question arises how to facilitate and speed up their production. The answer to the question posed is the production of leather applications using metal aids made according to the dimensions of the applications, and using (lohajzli) leather puncher, which knock out regular circular pieces of leather (Fig. 13) [3].



Fig. 13 Leather puncher (lohajzli) and metal extensions for making [3]

Each hole is drilled separately. Previously made schemes, sketches with measurements, regular spacing and hole ratios, were used to make metal aids for simpler and more convenient application development. (Fig. 14) [3].

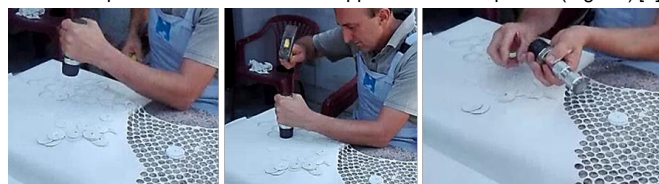
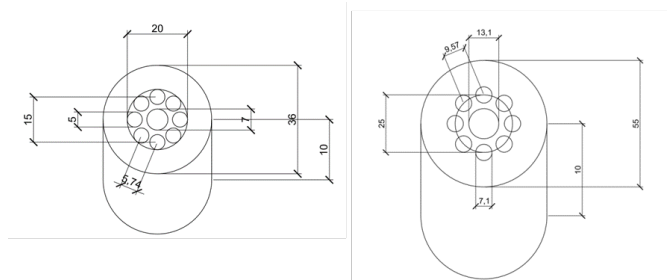


Fig. 14 The process of making the outer and middle circle of leather applications [3]

After all the outer circles are made, small inner holes are drilled. For the production, two metal parts were used, uncut according to the sketches of

leather applications, and the outer diameters of the (lohajzli) leather puncher extensions. (Fig. 15, 16) [3].



**Fig. 15** Schematic representation of a metal aid for making holes in leather applications: a) smaller, b) larger [3]



**Fig. 16** Made metal parts for making leather applications [3]

Drilling of the inner holes begins by placing the leather application on a solid surface in which a hole the size of the central inner circle of the application is drilled. The previously described unloaded metal part is placed on it. The layers of skin are fastened with a screw through the middle circle, so that there is no shift. In this way, the surrounding circles can be made without shift. Since leather applications are placed between the base and the metal part, this method of production allows drilling several layers of leather at the same time. However, each circle on the application must be punctured separate blow (lohajzli) leather puncher, with the extension of appropriate size. The same procedure applies to larger applications (Fig. 17) [3].



**Fig. 17** Metal parts fixed to the substrate [3]

The third type of leather applications, which are made are the smallest - circles with a diameter of 16 mm. They are also made, using lohajzli and an extension of a certain size. Once all applications are drilled, the small leather circles expose the heat, shrinking. A metal base is placed on the flame of medium strength, on which leather circles come. Each leather circle is exposed to heat for 1-2 min, depending on the thickness of the material and the rate of shrinkage. Once collected to the desired size, they are removed from the heated substrate, and the same procedure is continued with the next circles, until all the leather circles made are processed. When heated, in addition to shrinking leather, there is also inflation, which creates inflated, raised leather circles (Fig. 18) [3].

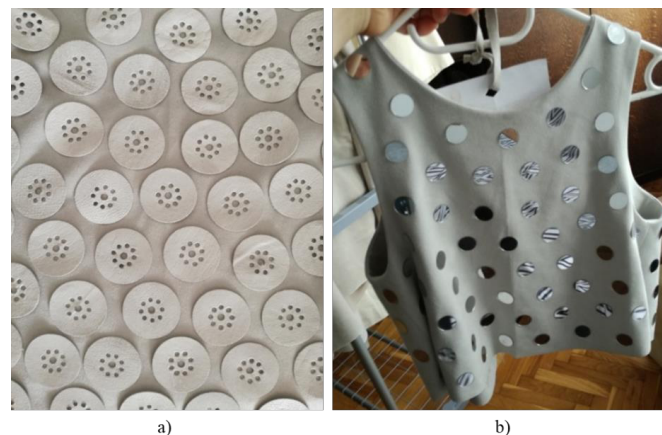


**Fig. 18** The smallest leather applications: a) perforated circular pieces of leather, b) finished look of leather circles [3]

### 3.2. Application

After the garments are made to a certain stage, the application of the made elements of leather and mirrors follows in three steps. Step One: Arrange the leather perforated appliqué on the selected garment. It is necessary to determine the exact position of the leather applications on the garment, so that it can be fixed with mirror glue coming under the leather applications.

Although the mirrors used to make the sheath were originally glass, they have been replaced in the collection by plastic mirrors. Plastic mirrors with their weight, thickness and processing are more suitable for application to the selected material without fear of damage (Fig. 19) [3].



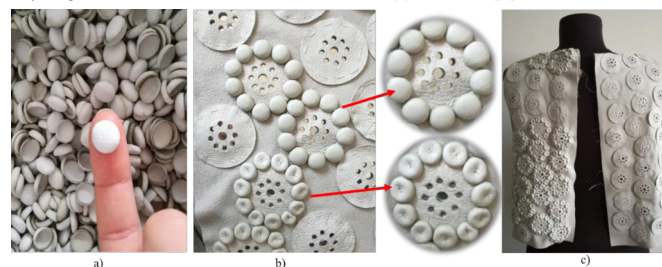
**Fig. 19** First step: a) arranging leather perforated applications on the garment, b) attached mirrors [3]

Once the glue has dried and fixed the mirror, the second step comes: sewing perforated leather ornaments over the mirrors. The perforated part of the leather appliqué is centered above the mirrors and sewn to the garment by hand along the edge (Fig. 20) [3].



**Fig. 20** Second step: sewing perforated leather applications on the mirror [3]

The third and final step is to sew the smallest inflated leather circles to the edge of the perforated leather appliqué. The smallest leather circles are sewn through the middle, the most inflated part, in such a way that the thread pulls it towards the fabric, creating a depression in the middle. The procedure is repeated until all the skin perforations are filled. A special leather needle was used for sewing, which was pointed on three sides (Fig. 21). Figure 22 shows the sewn-on leather applications [3].



**Fig. 21** Third step: a) leather circles ready for sewing, b) sewing the smallest inflated leather circles on the edge of the perforated leather application, c) clothing item in the process of sewing leather applications [3]



**Fig. 22** Sewn leather applications [3]



### 3.2. Fashion collection

The collection with ethno leather applications inspired by Slavonian folk costumes is shown in Figures 23-27 [3]. It can be noticed that according to the new guidelines and sustainability in fashion, in Figure 23, a part of the skin that would normally represent waste was also used, and here it ideally fits as a leather outer part of the pocket. Other realized models required long-term production and great precision and skill of the designer, considering that every leather detail, as previously described, was sewn by hand.



Fig. 23 Outfits 1 with details - ethno leather applications



Fig. 24 Outfits 2 with details - ethno leather applications

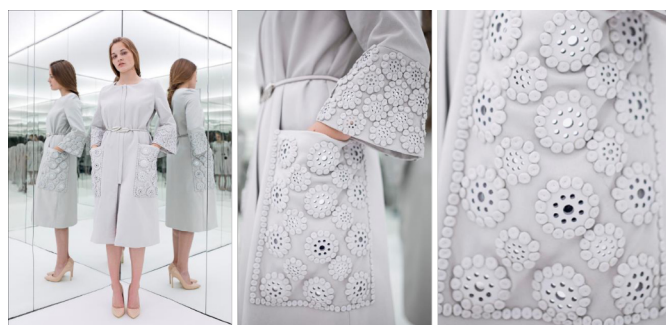


Fig. 25 Outfits 3 with details - ethno leather applications

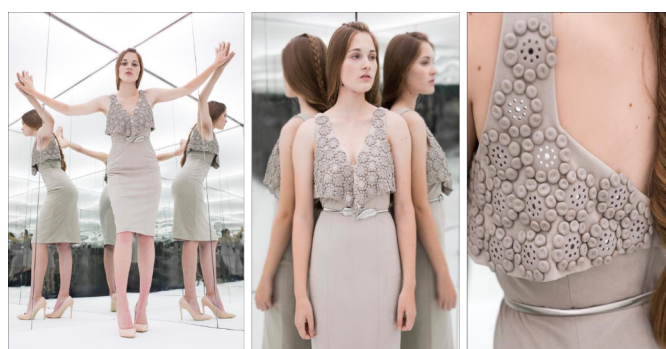


Fig. 26 Outfits 4 with details - ethno leather applications



Fig. 27 Outfits 5 with details - ethno leather applications

### 4. CONCLUSION

Today's lifestyle throws traditional clothing out of everyday use. It has been replaced by modern clothing from well-known brands. But, despite the sharp squeezing out of everyday life, the costume has managed to find its place by becoming a costume of folk dance and music expressions, and it is promoted by cultural and artistic societies and individuals. Thus, the costume provided itself with the need for maintenance and reconstruction. It has also become an eternal inspiration for many clothing collections.

In this paper, using only one of the techniques that enriched the costume, a collection was created that takes tradition out of its context, and gives it new life in another, modern, simple, refined garment. The collection is inspired by the perforated applications of a stylized floral pattern under which the mirror penetrates, as well as the way and technique of hand-sewing selected motifs. Perforated leather parts, mirrors and convex leather circles create a new texture of garments and refine it in a new way. The realized collection does not follow fashion trends, but shows its timeless beauty like the folk costumes according to which it was created. Old handicraft techniques, combined with clean lines, soft materials and delicate silhouettes, are an indicator of how inexhaustible and open the interpretation of the costume's costume is and as such an inexhaustible source of inspiration.

### 5. Literature

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