

African inspirations – wearable leather art,

by: Ana Caldas, Portugal

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Photo: Ana Caldas

Several years ago, during my return to jewellery, I've found leather as a material for artistic expression; its softness, pliability and easiness to be worked upon metallic tools, all helped for the making of several pieces of mine, published in this Newsletter ("Leather, gold foil, semi-precious stones, silver. Recreations in three- dimension artifacts". Leather Artisan no. 136, September 2010, pages 8-11; "In the Path of Love: a sculpture in leather, silk brocade, silver jewellery". Leather Artisan, no. 147, June 2013, pages 16-17). Amidst earlier leather work were few necklaces that in mid – 2014, became the foundation for further developments.

Last year I was about to participate in a Design Fair in Lisbon, and its theme was Africa; I was born in Angola, and such theme inspired me: I took from the shelf former essays and unfinished structures, and, along with book, magazines and few sites, I've recreated leather body ornaments rooted in Africa culture, mainly Angola.

For some necklaces I've used 2 mm veg-tan cowhide, cut in large circle, with few cuts made with a knife (pieces no.5,6,7 and 8) or by means of a sharp gothic arch chisel (pieces no. 1 and 3); wet, the neckring allows to get rounded, and the cuts can stand above its base. (the pendant, edit)

Holes for the braids to hold leather buttons were done beforehand, as well as the braided stitches that hold the medallion in place, having a small strip of leather behind it (piece no. 1); the medallion of this piece is carved by means of non-sharp chisels – used in Portuguese upholstery since early 17th century -, and covered with gold foil (three layers). In pieces no. 3,5,6 and 8, there's a strip folded over the neckring, having a braid on it ; being long, it gets glued in the back of three leather circles (pendants, edit), holding them in place. The three veg-tan circles (pendants, edit) were wet moulded inside a ceramic bowl, having a jar on top to remain in place for a day.

The three - circle medallions in piece no.3 are plain, where the other ones are ornamented; the ones of piece no.7 were creased in parallel lines inside a triangle, which I've also repeated in the large circle (all holes were done while the cowhide was flat and dry). The circles are in 3 mm cowhide, which became quite stiff after wet- moulding; I had to wet slightly in the surface to transfer the triangles' pattern. Already dry, I've covered them all with black acrylic, when it dried next day, I've used a light sand paper on their surface, so the black colour only remain in the crease lines; after brushing the remnant powder, I've used white acrylic with water to cover the three circles and the large neck circle, thus the black triangles lines stand out in a whitish background. Later I used straw to stitch/braid all the pieces. They remain together in a line by means of a small leather strip glued in the back. In pieces no. 6 and 8, similar small strips are used in the back; in piece no.6 the three circles have creased lines and were painted with red and white acrylics. In piece no.8 I've used wet acrylic, and the creased lines were marked with colour ball pens. In both I've used chrom-tan lace (cut at home); all the braids have underneath a strip /skived in both ends, as I wanted to rise the braids. Piece no.2 large circle was done in 2 mm cowhide, wet- moulded by hand, and later covered by a 1 mm thin chrom-tan leather strip; it's glued all around, making a kind of fan-like decoration. The front piece is 2 mm cowhide, worked upon its grain side. The creased lines were done following the shape of a rubber "snake", used in architecture drawings. The round leather button was put in the end: the holes were done with an electric drill.

In piece no.4 I've used fake panther fur, chrom-tan reddish leather, straw and leather lace; the beads, looking like old bone, were bought in a shop. A 4-lace braid holds the medallion.

Piece no.10 follows the shape of a face; I've used 2 mm veg-tan cowhide, working upon its flesh side. The holes in the " face" were done with a 5 mm punch; other piece of leather was covered with gold foil, and punched as well: the 5 mm gold covered tiny circles replaced the ones made in the "face"; thus gold dots seem engraved in the leather, previously covered with black acrylic in its flesh side, and sandpapered as well. Underneath it I've put sheepskin; its borders were cut with a sharp round chisel with tiny waves: all along the border I've stitched small shells taken from other African necklace. The upper three strip braid was bought in a leather shop.

In piece no.5 I've also used the flesh side of cowhide, again engraved with gold foil covered leather dots; round punches are easy to work upon in engraving, whereas, when it comes to triangles, one has to be very secure while cutting them off and putting new ones: any tiny mistake means the new triangle won't fit

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exactly This medallion also has gold foil covered cinnamon, fixed to leather by a strip; on top I've used turquoise round stones, fixed to leather by a tiny brass "needle". The medallion was wet-moulded to make the upper "tube2, to get fixed in the leather thick strings, bought in a leather shop.

Piece no. 9 was done using cowhide, again worked upon the flesh side. The inner line of the eyes has cuts and , after the modeling the eyebrows, the wetness allowed to emboss them.

After drying, I've used a torch to give the shades of burnt brown. The back side was covered with sheepskin, and gold foil was fixed in the space seen by the opening of the eyes. Sheepskin borders were cut by a sharp round chisel, and holes of 1 mm were done in all the "waves" of the border; again, dry straw – in Portugal its easily found I drugstores – was used, and I've kept it as long as it comes in the bundle. The upper part of the medallion makes a loop, where a braided strip – bought from an artisan in the street – gets fixed.

All these pieces were on show during the Desfñ Fair in Lisbon, in october 2014, as it hosted a show with models for the ones who were exposing body ornaments and fashion, I had the opportunity to show my jewellery pices, other gilt leather necklaces – material for a future article – and piece no. 9 worn by a black woman; photos no. 11 and 12 are of this model with the refferd necklace. This model show and photos can be seen in my Facebook page: [www. Facebook/ana.caldas.joalharia](http://www.Facebook/ana.caldas.joalharia)

Piece no.1



Piece no..2



Piece no.3

continuing :

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Piece no. 4



Piece no. 5



Piece no. 6



Piece no. 7



Piece no. 8

continuing

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Piece no. 9



Piece no. 10

Piece no. 11

(On a professional model)

