

Wilkie dress reproduction.
Photograph by Victoria
Hopgood, 2019.



ABSENT PRESENCE & THE REMAKING OF A WEDDING DRESS

By Dr. Ingrid Mida

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The wedding dress worn by Evelyn Wilkie on November 15, 1927 cannot be displayed on a mannequin since the dress is in very poor condition and small fragments of silk shatter each time the dress is moved. For this reason, a replica of the dress was created by Ryerson University Fashion Design student Olivia Da Cruz for the exhibition *Absent Presence: A Wedding Dress and the Drawings of Sarah Casey* (May 9 - July 5, 2019) at the MLC Gallery in Toronto. This blog post presents an overview of the remaking of the wedding dress.



Reproduction of the Wilkie dress. Photograph by Ingrid Mida, 2019.



Olivia Da Cruz studying the Wilkie dress. Photograph by Ingrid Mida, 2019.



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Wilkie dress reproduction. Rosette detail. Photograph by Victoria Hopgood, 2019.



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Wilkie dress reproduction. Pintuck detail. Photograph by Victoria Hopgood, 2019.

The sleeveless knee-length wedding dress was homemade, likely either by Evelyn Wilkie or her mother, since the quality of the stitching is somewhat irregular and there are no closures. The dress has a drop-waist and shawl collar with layers of pin tucks that add visual interest to the collar and dress skirt. There is a large rosette at the centre waist. Made of creamy white silk, the silver coated trim adds detail to the shawl collar and rosette. Since the dress cannot be handled safely, I made several drawings incorporating key measurements that I provided to Olivia for this project. She also her own observations of the dress using the checklists [*in The Dress Detective: A Guide to Object-based Research in Fashion.*](#)

Olivia first made a replica of the dress in muslin so that we could check the accuracy of the garment against the original. **During that process, Olivia discovered the complex construction of the shawl collar as well as the high level of precision required to create the multiple rows of pintucks to ensure that the rows were evenly spaced, horizontal to the floor and also matched up at the side seams.** This practice helped Olivia achieve perfection in recreating the dress in silk avoiding any unwanted needle holes in this fine textile.

The final result is a replica that was displayed in the gallery on a mannequin. **The replica dress is a creamy white silk but admittedly looks different from the actual dress, since it has not yet yellowed with time.** As well, it was impossible to source an exact replica of the fine silver trim that was on the original. **Nonetheless, the remaking of the dress conveys the slim vibrant body of Evelyn Wilkie, allowing us to reimagine her walking down the aisle to her beloved.**

The remaking of historic garments allows the researcher to learn from doing. Fashion scholar [Hilary Davidson](#) recently published an article called **“The Embodied Turn: Making and Remaking Dress as an Academic Practice”** in *Fashion Theory* (2019) that situates this type of remaking as a research method within academic practice. I recommend this article to students as a resource for such work and invite students to harness the multitude of garments in the Ryerson University Fashion Research Collection that might be the source material for this type of research.