

## Faculty Development Grant Report

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### Project description:

In Spring 2012, I received a faculty development grant to fund a trip to Belgium to visit the MOMU (Mode Museum), see the current exhibition of “Living Fashion Women’s Daily Wear 1750-1950,” and attend an annual fashion show of Royal Academy of Fashion in Antwerp.

### Major activities during trip:

MOMU fashion museum is located in the same building as Royal Academy of Fashion in Antwerp, Belgium.



**Living Fashion** showcases 100 silhouettes from the Dutch collector *Mrs. Jacob de Jonge*. The exhibition gives an overview of the clothing worn at various times of the day by middle-class women from 1750-1950. From morning and domestic apparel to traveling outfits, there were wide varieties of clothes. The women revealed by this collection were very fashionable, but they were not the trendsetters. They conformed to the fashion of their time as closely as possible.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, the growing social importance of the middle classes brought a new demographic of wealthy citizens who wanted to flaunt their status through clothing and behavior, and this culture began to take root in public life. Additionally, the urban environment gave women new freedom of movement. It was also fashion that liberated them from their boudoir. This stimulated consumption and

fashionable activities amongst women in these social circles.

This exhibition displays 13 different segments based on the various events and activities women regularly partook in. They were all displayed on body forms, often hanging from the ceiling, or on a spinning platform. I was particularly amazed by all the under garment displays (corsets for all different occasions and crinoline with metal rings). Specifically, I was extremely fascinated by “Double usage” and “A second life.”

Certain elements of the underclothing like stays, corsets, crinoline or hooped skirts and the busk were less comfortable, but they were characteristic of the time period. They were made out of various materials like cotton, linen, lace, metal, whalebones, silk satin, damask, mesh, and leather. They are pretty much a form of artistic architecture with its exquisite structural details, ergonomic shapes, and method of construction.

### Corseted



Corset in silk damask,  
with whalebone,  
lined with linen, 1770-1790



Corset in cotton, with metal stay, decorated with  
silk satin ribbon, 1905-1910



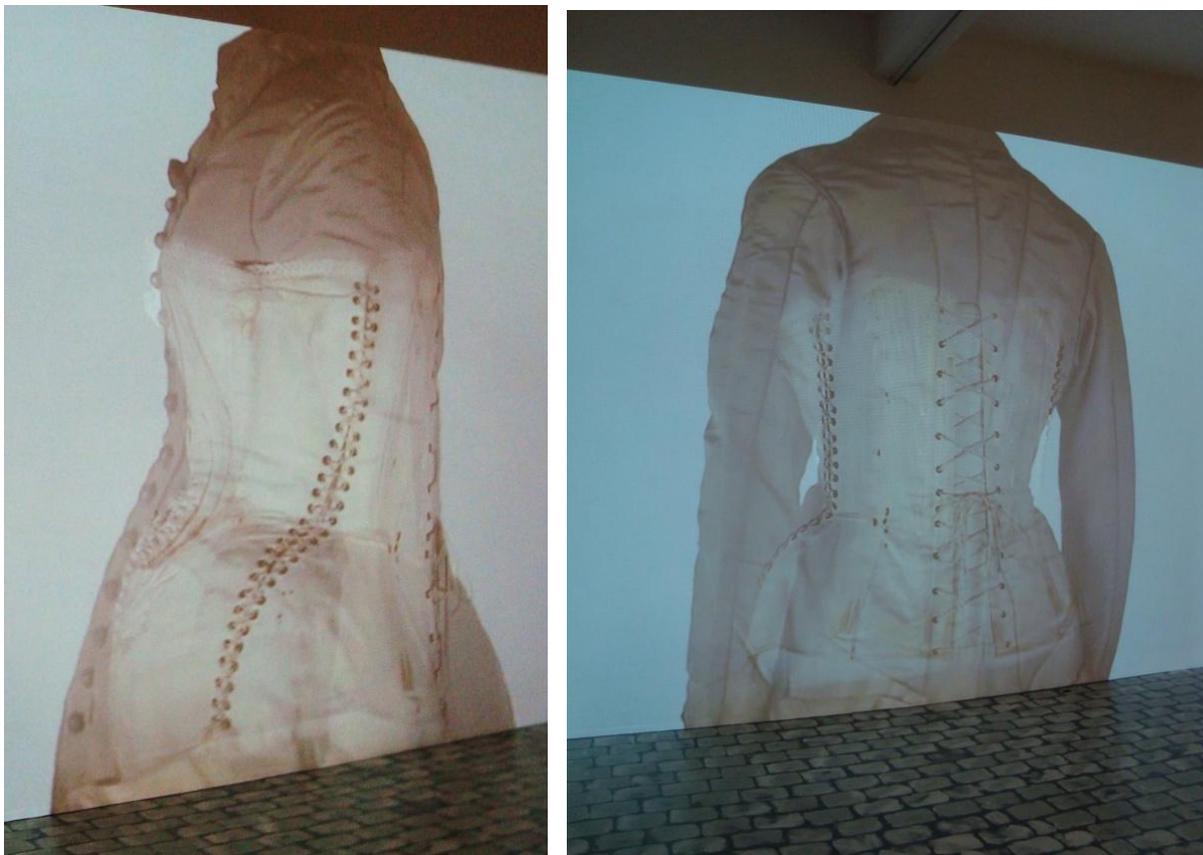
Corset in cotton,  
with metal stays,  
decorated with machine-made  
lace  
1900-1910



Maternity corset, with elastic front and laces in elastic to accommodate a pregnancy. 1860

The corset has a symbolic meaning to a women's life. Despite the fact that it is not meant to be shown to others since it is an undergarment, the corset needs to be well-crafted and extensively tailored to keep a woman's body in a desirable shape. A woman's sense of self, wealth, and social status was reflected in her measurement. The width of the crinoline and narrowness of the lower torso served as accurate parameters for determining class. A woman's body markings, exaggerated curves, and contours appeal to a man's nurturing and sensual needs. The focus on appearance was predominantly initiated by men who felt that it was best to keep a woman's mind preoccupied with fashion and out of political, economic and social affairs. How women perceived themselves and how they thought others perceived them had a direct impact on what they wore on their skins.

Around the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when elastic inserts began replacing rigid strays (refer to corsets for maternity in previous page), some of the pain resulting from wearing laced corsets was gradually reduced. Even so, the structural composition of the corset limited women's involvement in sports and made pregnancy unbearable.



Overlapped image of corset worn under the dress.

## Caged



Crinoline with metal rings, linen ribbons  
And leather belt, 1860-1870



Crinoline in cotton, with metal rings, 1870-1875



Maid helping lady into crinoline dress, 1860,

Throughout history, the crinoline and the corset thrived in a symbiotic relationship. Although each played very distinct roles, they had one goal in common: to create a specific silhouette for the foundation of garments with the focus of creating the illusion of a small waist. The purpose of crinoline was to create a cone-shaped infrastructure for the lower body which made the fashionable wasp waist look even smaller in contrast to the width of the hem.



Busk in cotton, decorated with lace, with metal stays, 1880-1885

With the industrial revolution in the late 1860s, the popularity of crinoline began to wane as a result of the introduction of the railroad. As traveling became easier and more accessible to a wider class of people, the necessity of wearing “travel friendly” clothing became increasingly apparent. The new bustled silhouette certainly made walking easier as it did going through doors and stepping onto platforms.

“Necessity is the mother of the invention.”

By the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, fabrics became lighter in weight and garments less structured. Supple fabrics meant more fluid shapes and styles, which in turn diminished the need for under garments. Around 1920s, women were literally shedding layers upon layers of underwear, and gracefully stepping out of a world of restraint.

Despite their historically symbolic origins, all these well-crafted undergarments continue to provide endless inspiration to all fashion designers in the modern world. Year after year, corset- inspired looks had been very common themes not only for all levels of fashion students, but also for mainstream designers. It evokes a mysterious quality and fosters imagination much like the pyramids in Egypt. Its meticulously planned seams, proportion, ergonomic curves, and intricate enforcement devices are perfect combinations for an art piece. It is very, traditional, modern and futuristic at the same time.

### *Double Usage & A Second Life*

During my past 15 years at Otis' fashion department, I thoroughly enjoyed any project presented where we had the opportunity to transform garments into different looks or adjust them for different occasions with smart devices. I loved the theme of frugality and how one piece could have many different functions. It's like getting many outfits for the price of one. This idea was directly associated with recycling garments and reflected a sustainable approach to fashion. I have worked on numerous design projects which related directly to these concepts.

I was so excited to see these two segments at the MOMU exhibition: "*Double Usage*" and "A second Life". I had never seen this type of approach to historical costumes at any other exhibition. A dress could be worn in different ways, or it could be made suitable for different occasions by adding different segments. This resulted in multiple uses, or *double usage*, for the same dress. This concept is associated with 'modern styling.'

Women can be very frugal and creative when it comes to how they make use of their dresses. An afternoon dress can be often transformed into an evening dress (current fashion term could be "*Day to Date*" clothing). For instance, an indoor outfit could be adapted for taking a walk by hoisting up the skirt, so that it does not drag on the ground (current term could be "*Adjustability for multi- function*").

Nowadays, wearing refurbished or recycled clothing is a part of the fashion trend, but it was almost unthinkable in the past for women of fashion to wear old clothing with visible modifications. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, however, remaking and remodeling clothing was utilized in order to extend the lives of costly fabrics.

During this creative alteration process, seams can be removed or pieces of fabric can be added. Sometimes, the reverse side of the fabric could be used as the exterior.



Silk evening dress, 1838, loose, long sleeves attached with ribbons inside the short sleeve changed the dress into a dinner dress.



Dress in silk, cashmere shawl, 1840-1850  
The dress could be worn with a variety of linen or lace collars and with or without a cashmere shawl



Dress with train in silk rep. decorated with embroidery, removable train, 1890-1895,





Evening cape, 1885, made from an old cashmere shawl, 1850



Empire dress in cambric, 1810, made from a dress, 1795, of which the bodice has been preserved.



Evening dress in rayon, decorated with machine lace of metal thread, 1925-1930



War-time dress in changeant silk, 1940-1945, made from a dress originally from around 1898, using the brick red reverse side of the fabric, which was very fashionable.

## Fashion show of Royal Academy of Fashion, Antwerp (on Thursday, June 8<sup>th</sup>)



Annual fashion show of Royal Academy was scheduled for 3 nights (June 8<sup>th</sup> through 10<sup>th</sup>). The duration of one show was almost 3 hours and 30 minutes, since every level of students had to present their works: 1<sup>st</sup> bachelor, 2<sup>nd</sup> bachelor, 3<sup>rd</sup> bachelor and Master. The 1<sup>st</sup> bachelor showed 3 different projects (1 outfit per each project), 2<sup>nd</sup> bachelor presented their own collections of 6 outfits, 3<sup>rd</sup> bachelor presented a collection of 8 outfits, and Master showcased their collection of 12 outfits under their name. Each student was fully responsible for their own presentation including the concepts of music, make-up, and stage set.

Unlike most of the fashion schools in the US, their approach to fashion shows was very conceptual. Their priority was creating different looks that identify each student as a different individual with a unique concept. In the beginning, I was shocked and confused to see their very different and extreme expressions presented through each collection. I had been conditioned to focus on clothing that could be commercially successful or practical. A majority of them were not wearable for daily life, but I don't think that was a part of their intentions.

As I stated on my proposal for the Faculty Grant, I was always inspired by Belgian fashion designers like Ann Demeulemeester, Martin Margiela, Dries Van Noten, Olivier Theyskens, Raf Simon, and Dirk Bikkembergs. These designers strongly influenced my career as a fashion designer.

The Royal Academy of Antwerp is known for developing future famous designers, who often end up producing their own labels. Their collection inspired me to think outside the box, push the envelope of creativity, and to approach shapes in

unconventional ways to create unexpected looks.

That is the main reason why I developed such a deep curiosity for this city, Antwerp, and the Royal Academy of Art. This curiosity made me eager to follow their footsteps and visit the Mode Museum in Antwerp, which has been a major source of inspiration for all students at the Fashion Academy. I was eager to find out about the secret behind all their success in fashion.

In 2013, The Fashion department of the Antwerp Royal Academy will be celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. In 1963 Mary Prijot set up fashion and theater costume department at the school. At the time, Belgium was of absolutely no significance in the world of fashion. The real change came in the beginning of the eighties. In the late 70s, a group of new students rebelled against the traditional fashion rules imposed by the school. In the early 80s, Walter Van Beirendonck, Martin Margiela, Ann Demeulemeester, Dries Van Noten, Marina Yee and Dirk Van Saene graduated from the academy and their collection garnered great press and attention from Paris fashion weeks.

Another important factor in this success story was the Belgium government initiative called 'Textielplan' (Textile Policy). Its aim was to support the textile industry and stabilize the job market in that sector. They started to support young designers through competition such as the Golden Spindle and advertising campaigns such as 'Fashion, this is Belgian'.

Of the talented designers scouted through the Golden Spindle contest, six were to determine the reputation of Belgian fashion internationally.



Value to Otis:

Apart from the two main focuses that I wrote about for this report, I went to many different museums and special stores to find out the most 'Flanders' inspired pieces, which is fundamental for all Belgium fashion designers.



Museum Rene Magritte



St. Gudule church



St, Michael church



Horta Museum



Lace & Costume  
Museum



Groeninge museum



Rubens house



MHKA (Museum of  
contemporary art)



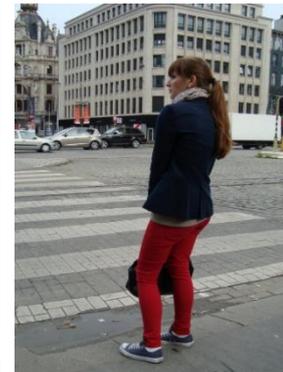
Specialty stores



shoes



window display



street fashion



Architectures

I plan to put together all this valuable visual research as a teaching resource. I will share a documentary via PowerPoint presentation with my fashion department peers during the back to school faculty meeting before school starts and will have a 'Brown bag' presentation for our students who are very excited to hear about this trip. Many have expressed great interest in well-known Avant-garde Belgium Fashion designers and their design inspirations. The DVD on the Royal Academy Fashion show of last year will be reserved in the library for students and faculty. All the pictures taken in the museum will be used when we are looking for new concepts. After my report is posted on O-space, it will be widely shared among Otis community. I will continue to make myself available to students, faculty and staff as a consultant regarding Belgian fashion.

### Conclusion

Every Belgian designer has a highly individual idea of fashion, but together they share a profound interest in tradition, both in technical and historical sense. When I walked in the streets of Antwerp, Brussels or Bruges, I sensed two different moods. One is historical, inert, and still very present. The second, however, is like a free air of curiosity. These two contrasting, yet often blending feelings make the very special ambiance of Belgian cities.

A balance between creation and professionalism- between fantasy and reality- make Belgian designers quite a kind of their own. Without reference to the past, it is impossible to live in the present and imagine the future. I believe it's due to their historical and cultural background. Antwerp offers a great environment for an art school. Its history, monuments and museums reflect the histories and the tradition of the art.

The strength of the Belgians lies in their strong sense of concept without compromises, but with pure aesthetics and personality. On this note, one article about Walter Van Beirendonck, current leadership of Royal Academy of Fashion, had a huge impact on my teaching philosophy: "*A lecturer will never impose his taste. I try to get into the student's head, give advice and stretch their boundaries. It's all about stimulating without influencing*".

I thank the Otis College of Art for awarding me the faculty development grant that made it possible to be in the Belgian cities, to feel and interact with Belgian artworks, and touch collections of fashion designers who have earned my long-term admiration. Furthermore it gave me a valuable opportunity to look back on myself as a fashion educator and question whether or not I was leading my students to think outside of the box well enough, and whether or not I, myself was thinking outside of box before I teach my students.

This funding advances my career as a fashion designer and broadens my insight as a fashion educator. It was both educational and inspirational. I greatly appreciated the opportunity.