Focus on Sustainability in ATD re:Dress Exhibit

Eco-friendly fashion design is becoming a mainstay of CAL’s Apparel and Textile Design program, so the opportunity to exhibit environmentally and socially responsible designs at the MSU Museum was right up the program’s runway, so to speak. MSU’s ATD students routinely design gowns and garments as class projects, but this opportunity allowed them to design an entire exhibit revolving around sustainability.

Titled “re:Dress—Sustainable Fashion Design,” and located in the MSU Museum’s Heritage Gallery, the nearly 3-month-long exhibit was led by Theresa M. Winge, professor in the Apparel and Textile Design Program in the College’s Department of Art, Art History, and Design, with assistance from ATD senior student designer and assistant curator Lauren Paulauskas.

For “re:Dress,” 42 designs were submitted to be evaluated by a jury of students and faculty, and 16 designs were selected, based on aesthetics, design process, innovation, creativity, and sustainability percentage.

“Students tackled the ‘green’ aspects of the design with different strategies,” explains Winge. “Some students chose to buy environmentally and socially responsible fabric, others chose to upcycle or recycle discarded or secondhand clothing and objects, and still others chose to use zero-waste patterning to maximize their fabric within their design decisions.”

The results were incredibly inspired. One dress was re-purposed from a $5 discarded 1980s wedding dress, while another student constructed a wedding dress using two former bridesmaids’ dresses. Another designer made use of seven black shirts found at Goodwill and Volunteers of America to create a full-length gown. On the more experimental side, students crimped, coiled, lashed and braided a wide range of unconventional materials: latex gloves, a luggage belt, corn husks, bubble wrap, beer cans, lottery tickets, bicycle tires and telephone cords, and more.

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Not only did CAL’s ATD students create the fashions for the exhibit, they created the exhibit itself. Students assisted in preparing and installing exhibit components, from writing “interpretive” text describing the process of creating their dresses, to producing wall graphics, multimedia, print pieces and exterior banners. The MSU student group of AIGA (professional association for design) collaborated with the Apparel and Textile Design students on the installation, led by faculty advisor Kelly Salchow MacArthur, and student representatives Danielle McHale and Elise Androkites.

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“Seeing how the apparel industry addresses green issues is fascinating and informative,” adds Mary Worrall, assistant curator of folk arts at the MSU Museum and one of the exhibit’s organizers. “The creativity of design is amazing and the fact that the design addresses issues of sustainability makes these garments truly relevant to worldwide concerns of a healthy, sustainable environment.”

In addition to exhibitions that grow from its collections and curators’ research, the MSU Museum works with MSU faculty and students around campus to explore new topics and innovative ways to present them. The MSU Museum provides experimental space for these short-run exhibits that can present a range of topics where artifacts or specimens and conventional storytelling are side-by-side with new-media technology, artistic installation pieces and performance works.