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Shared vision leads to interdepartmental collaboration

Fashion-architecture project partnership reveals the power of crossing disciplines

By Cristina Schreil

At this year's Spring Show, one unconventional collection between then-B.F.A. students Gardenia Zhou and Lamiae Ameziane attracted considerable attention. They dubbed it "architecture that moves."

Situated outside of and within a sectioned-off area at the Academy of Art University's School of Architecture (ARH) were garments that seemed to fuse different worlds. Sleek

and chic, they were made from materials like wool and tweed but sported unique elements—most notably, three-dimensional floating fan-like structures or cage-like geometric structures jutting out from them like futuristic buildings. The six-piece collection, the result of a year-long working relationship between Zhou and Ameziane, was also an example of a fruitful and rare cross-department collaboration between Academy fashion and architecture students.



Details from the bottom of one garment. Photo by Luyang Tian.



The designers said that the biggest challenge was to create garments that sit on a body that's in motion. Photo by Luyang Tian.



The collection was originally influenced by underwater creatures such as coral and sea sponges. Photo by Luyang Tian.

"That's been really, really interesting to see," ARH Undergraduate Assistant Director Karen Seong said at Spring Show. "It's interesting to see for an external audience, but for the students, I think it's an eye-opening experience to see a really intense, creative endeavor in a different field." Presenting their work at Spring Show, the

duo later received special recognition for the project.

The vision began with Zhou, who's since graduated from the School of Fashion (FSH) and has moved to the New York metropolitan area. In the Fall 2018 semester, she wanted to create pieces inspired by undersea coral, sea glass, sea sponges, and jellyfish. Soon, the work of

modern architecture titans Zaha Hadid and Frank Gehry caught her eye, influencing her vision.

That's where it got more complicated.

"I was trying to make more and more laser cuts, 3-D models and [those types of] things," said Zhou, describing how she wanted to bring building-like structures to her designs. She first tried with wool felt, but it was too heavy. To carry out her vision, she needed lighter, yet still sturdy material. She needed to broaden her skills, especially concerning laser cutting, and sought someone who knew how to use certain software that would help her build what she wanted. Turns out, it's software that architecture students know well. To help, FSH leaders connected her to ARH, and then to Ameziane, who first helped her find a different texture base. Ameziane suggested Zhou use foam to create her architecture-inspired structures. They used software for 3-D visualization, laser cutting, and a vacuum that helps create physical models.

Together, they also decided to print designs onto the foam—which proved a challenge, as they needed to find a way to do so without the foam melting. Together, they found a facility that would.

For Ameziane, who graduated this past spring, it was a welcome chance to flex muscles for a passion she'd long had. "I've always been really interested in fashion," she reflected at Spring



Materials like wool and foam combine to create unusual structures and garments. Photo by Luyang Tian.

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The designers were inspired by contemporary architecture. Photo by Luyang Tian.

Show. Ameziane said she learned about how to take the architectural concepts she'd learned but applied them to this new field. It was a balancing act, to create structural garments that were still light, and still moved fluidly on and fit naturally to a human body. "The biggest challenge was to, first, create something that sits on a body and then create something that sits on a body that's in motion... I think that's been one of the nicest things, we both learned a lot from each other."

Zhou said that communication and a willingness to learn from one another was vital, leading to a rare union across the two very different crafts. Her advice to other Academy students who hope to have a similar collaborative project: "If you think you know everything and you don't really talk and discuss with the other person, that will not work at all. Try to learn more. Try to bring more things out."

Cristina Schreil is a Publications Staff Reporter for Academy Art U News.



The designers used software typically used for architecture projects. Photo by Luyang Tian.



It was a challenge to create structural garments that were still light. Photo by Luyang Tian.



Architecture and fashion collide in the celebrated collection. Photo by Luyang Tian.