

## RCA Fashion Graduates Explore Seoul Garment District



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RCA Fashion graduates Marie Maisonneuve (Menswear, Knit 2016) and Luke Stevens (Menswear, 2016) are part of the exhibition 'Project Seoul Apparel' (PSA), co-curated by Contemporary Art at the RCA Stephanie Seungmin Kim and architect Isak Chung, seeks to improve the living and working conditions in Changsin-dong through an application of sustainable operational methods.

Changsin-dong is a neighbourhood in Seoul where numerous small-scale needlework artisans produce high-quality garments for the Dongdaemun fashion district. Garment factories began opening in the area in the 1970s and there are now approximately 100 factories, a significant component of the garment industry, considering the possibilities offered by this unique industrial model present in Changsin-dong.

Earlier this year, Marie and Luke visited Seoul for an initial research trip, which was followed by a period of development at the RCA with tutors Susan Postlethwaite and Lee Roach. Through a socially engaged and critical design approach, Marie and Luke explored how the district might grow sustainably, and ways it could become more accessible and attractive to young designers.

Describing the experience of curating the project, Stephanie said: 'It has been a quite a journey to work with the Fashion Programme and to have the experience to be able to listen to Zowie, Susan and Lee along with the very talented designers, RCA alumni Luke and Marie.'

Luke and Marie's responses focused on the idea of 'Efficiency Aesthetics' – drawn from their observations that everything from the large wholesale retailers where fabric and fixings can be found in one place, to the layout of the factories with different floors of the same building.

Marie's work reflects the importance of the human network within the Changsin-dong industry, in particular the delivery of garments on their backs where vehicles cannot traverse the narrow streets. Marie has created a knitted harness which can provide protection for the wearer against the pressures of manual labour. The final piece was partly made in London and partly in Seoul, reflecting the limitations of manufacture in each location might be.

For the exhibition Luke has designed a graphic identity for the factory ephemera, such as the plastic bags used to carry ready-made finished products. The work explores ideas of hybridity and the complex multiplicities of re-appropriation at work within the global debate about the speed and retranslation of fashion, where the origins of a design are now impossible to trace or to translate. Luke translated a text from English to Korean, observing the changes that took place, and how language became almost abstract. Through the language of fashion, its translation and the reappropriation of luxury branding, Luke suggests that Seoul is repositioning itself as a hub for makers with a burgeoning young designer-led fashion culture.

Marie and Luke also collaborated to create an 'Efficiency Aesthetic' branded sleeve, based on the protective sleeves worn by people living or working in Changsin-dong to reflect on the future of the area and write comments in a blank space left on the sleeve. The ongoing process of gentrification in the area, will be displayed as part of the exhibition.

**Project Seoul Apparel** is part of the collaborative 'Connected City' project, an official UK/Korea 2017–18 programme celebrating and showcasing the UK's innovative and excellence in the arts and creative industries in Korea.

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WRITER

Jessie Bond

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AREA

AlumniRCA

SCHOOL

School of Design

PROGRAMME

Fashion Womenswear

Fashion Menswear