

EVENT FEEDBACK

SEOUL FASHION WEEK A/W12: SOUTH KOREAN FASHION'S MASSIVE ICEBERG, LOST ON AN ENDLESS RUNWAY.

After so many years it's still a big concern where Seoul Fashion Week is heading, is it a new fashion front? Is it about massive labels? Is it both? Its time its loyal audience should severely evaluate the event. Since the last October edition, instead of improving, this mega platform seems to have lost its own direction and positioning. Scheduled last minute last April not only turned the event into a distant island for professional's agendas, it also brought a risk to the majority of talented Seoul designers who are fighting to conquer buyers and press within this prestigious network. Worldwide fashion professionals leave their homes twice (or four times) a year under a well organized and synchronized itinerary to cities including Milan, Paris, Barcelona, Stockholm, Copenhagen, New York, London and Tokyo. By letting Seoul not only appear as the last but also being uncertain on its planning (dates, selected designers, organization contacts), make visitors and general supporters depreciate it to the point of ignoring it. Most of the buying budget has been given away by the time they visit Seoul, if not totally expended and the chance for labels getting new clients is reduced. More than enough information has been collected around the globe in order to generate a proper media excitement but only on Seoul Fashion Week's unclear goals. The current panorama isn't the best one. But who are the most affected in this bureaucratic and anonymous umbrella (SFW) that lacks fashion understanding? The designer's themselves.

The following paragraphs give a rough overview of all the matters in the organization that Seoul Fashion Week and Seoul Metropolitan Government should seriously take into consideration. The intentions are simple, to improve South Korean's best designers working conditions by given them a proper logistic and certainty in their careers. Both are urgently needed.

From 78 **shows** scheduled in six days ambitiously compared to the success of Paris who host's 100 shows in nine days, SFW still offers a massive selection of designers. Last April's edition got even an extra injection of new names which became a complex-heavy story, not only difficult to visualize, but added a different quality level (lower) next to those established designers who have been consequent on developments and improvements during the last five years. By adding labels that belong to the middle-low segment, it clouds the general event's quality. Mixing well made garments with cheap production does not deliver a clear product message. As we all know buyers and media will always focus on selecting a small amount of designers, follow them and try to grow together. Ready-to-Wear is indeed the world's most successfully industrial formula in fashion, why try including couture collections (a mature non suitable phenomenon) when not even Paris can afford it. Seoul Fashion Week shouldn't be about the quantity; it should be about defining its best designers who compromise quality on contemporary design in the long term. A curatorial board is necessary to eliminate a high percentage of designer-labels by defining one characteristic and a representative designers front. Seoul Fashion Week should have thirty designers as maximum, no more. We can't deny it, not all designers are suitable for big venues, small strong stories written in large books loose their strength. And not all collections are suitable for a large runway.



Just a few **designers** have managed to build up sales-press agents in other big fashion capitals like Paris and New York (Resurrection, Groundwave, Ci Choy, Parkchoonmoo, Juun.J, Lie Sang Bong and Songzio). They are the privileged references of South Korean fashion; they contribute to create the pyramid's apex that SFW seems to avoid. From all local talents, we could easily separate those who potentially will operate on regional markets from those with international perspective. The last one should be SFW's content - international. When selecting only the best designers, Seoul Fashion Week could fit its schedule into four days instead of six, giving the chance for visitors to see the whole event. It also would reduce a lot of unnecessary effort on producing an event that could be smaller and less expensive but more affective. Budgeting a fashion week is a responsibility for fashion professionals, and how to divide it should be also supervised by a curatorial board. Fashion is about hierarchy first, but in an economic sensitive world it is also about segmenting designer's products (high, middle and low), something SFW seems also incapable to do. By giving all designers the same possibilities does not lead into a brighter short-term future, more of a complicated event, which will hardly bear improvements. If changes aren't rapidly made we will keep circling around the same process with no destination. Starting the same program on repeat each season from scratch over and over again will obscure its potential definition, fulminating the future of many ambitious ones. But what about those trapped talented designers at home with unique visions? Sooner some of them will inevitably reject the idea of entering SFW if it's not the right podium for growth and choose their own professional path. Completely understandable as we know fashion doesn't offer you so many chances.



Photo: Backstage Groundwave A/W12
Courtesy of The Raccoon, Seoul.

Men

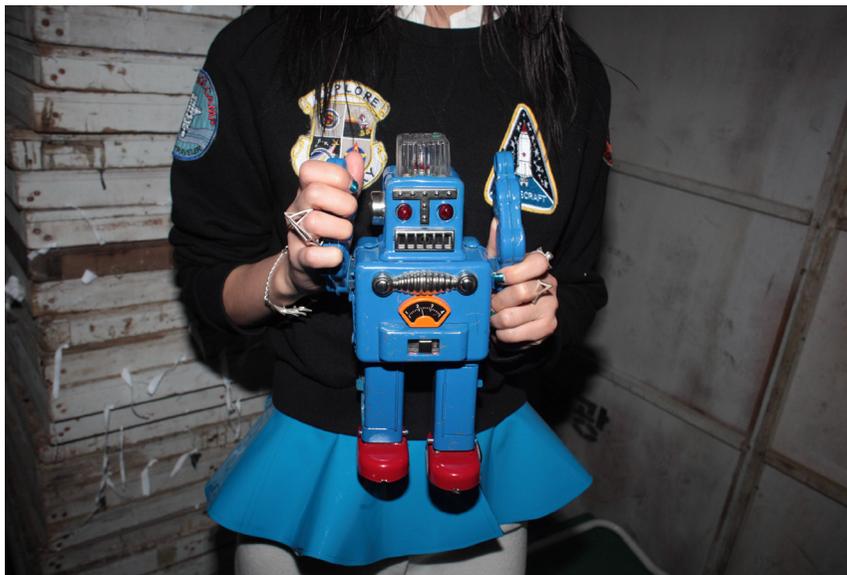
Best Men collections(*):

- GROUNDWAVE
- CY CHOI
- LEIGH
- SEIZE SEI
- ROLIAT
- BEYOND CLOSET
- JEHEE SHEEN
- GENERAL IDEA
- RESURECTION
- THE ALANI
- INSTANTOLOGY
- MVIO



Based on that busy international agenda, **buyers** must choose where to spend their budget. If the scheduled collections lack quality in general, that will be the reason to leave aside Korean designers. Labels like Leigh, Jehee Sheen, Cy Choi, Resurrection and Groundwave are part of Seoul's strongest supplies, menswear, next to General Idea, Instantology and Beyond Closet in the street wear area. How to contribute in their growing business plan is more relevant than giving them a runway show extremely late when analyzing the challenging men markets. While most men A/W12 orders were purchased in January worldwide, how did SFW expect positive conquests in the month of April? More and more questions put SFW under study, is it really necessary to create such a big scale event with almost no direct economical impacts? For buyers, the attraction of visiting SFW is about the provocation on spotting designers, and also on the possibility of choosing at least one local to buy from. Something almost impossible when the struggle for the buyer's decision on spending their money is at least two months behind, and mostly closed. The A/W12 order confirmations are already archived on their files, therefore when visiting Seoul it might turn to be just a nice short visit to Asia (different than a planned buying trip). Fashion is not about entertainment; it's about business interactions and decisions. We also lost some quality designers in the last program like The Alani, Instantology and MVIO, showing how destructive it is to make radical internal changes in the organization clipping those who were previously on the right track.

Press, one of fashion's most difficult partners to keep satisfied, and its not properly selected. During last April's shows, the entire event had no London (with Paris almost invisible) press coverage at all. A notorious mistake, when London is the world's epicenter for upcoming fashion designers. Not to mention how positively loud SFW would have been when written in English, fashion's first language. One of the best South Korean ambassadors on fashion abroad is based in London after living some years in Seoul - Mr.Chad Burton (THE XOXO KIDS). He knows perfectly where the specialty on local designers is, and who are the ones to talk about. In addition, he works as a fashion journalist with local media and international media from England and was not even considered as a guest. In addition, he never received an answer on his persistent requests to SFW's director. Something SFW should make sure that happens is - when having a low guest budget all absent press should have access to their image bank, instead of unprofessionally not replying to the several sent emails. In the end, for press it doesn't matter where they go, the main reason is to join these global events. Once again, local politics seems to block designer's success.



Women

Best Women collections(*):

- LEYII
- S=YZ
- STEVE J & YONI P
- JOHNNY HATES JAZZ
- VASILLY
- PUSH BUTTON
- KAAL E SUK TAE
- PARKCHOONMOO
- HEXA BY KUHO
- LIE SANG BONG

Photo: Backstage Steve J & Yoni P A/W12
Courtesy of The Raccoon, Seoul.



At last, international guests are extremely important. They define the event's profile, and give the opportunity to bring it positively further. But this will only happen when SFW knows who to invite. The guest list seems to have no changes from the time SFW was dealing with the press office in Paris (Totem) some years ago. A close evaluation on guests work per season is also relevant, why invite people who only approach the event under the need of entertainment? They don't generate attention for the event at all, except enjoy the charming city of Seoul. Within SFW's fixed guest list there are names that have absolutely no role or influence on the fashion system, not at all. With the designers having absolutely not participation here, we could say it's useless to select guests the way it's currently randomly done. The worst is, SFW hardly reaches companies main players, guests fall into their assistances or free-lance contributors, not the ones with the right voice. The reason is simple, its notoriously delayed announcement (last edition was announced on March the 20th when the calendar was starting on April the 2nd). More attention on this matter is critical. As an example, the last day of SFW A/W12 collections (Saturday April the 7th) the city welcomed one of three best fashion photographers in the high-end layer, MrTommy Ton (JAK & JIL). When having his visit better coordinated with the Korean host company (CLUB MONACO) and have shared his cost, SFW would have been involved with his sharp camera. This proves SFW's attention is not about the event's definition, instead on the basic principle of making it happen. It's about local satisfaction under Seoul's media operations, there's obviously a political pressure.

Unfortunately, Seoul Fashion Week's organization is associated to a ghost entity, no e-mail replies is a frequent occurrence when trying to contact the direction (emails were bouncing back a week later after last October edition ended) no answers at all or answered by outsiders (hospitality agency interns), a familiar and awkward feature. Communication doesn't run properly, when buyers or press worldwide try to get in contact for the first time with the organization, they hardly get a reply. Let's be clear, a fashion week is not an event that shows up twice a year for a week, it should exist the whole year round sharing their dynamic vision and support. A representative director is certainly needed, most influential guests have often the urge to elaborate dialogue during visits to Seoul by sharing their constructive opinions and conclusions. For that protocol duty you need a physical responsible, but qualified person for their function.

As alternative runways we refer to the fact that the world totals more than twenty interesting fashion weeks per season, and Seoul Fashion Week is surrounded by an anonymous organization and definitely having some handicaps does not contribute to a common progress. Filled tents with celebrities and entertained visitors holding propaganda gadgets (goodie-bags) will not define the future of South Korean fashion. Using only three letters from the word fashion, simplifying (S), internationalizing (I) and organizing (O) are part of that process achieving a solid team behind Seoul Fashion Week. Fashion isn't about politics; it's an autonomous business in itself. And we all need to see talented designers under the right organization.

MARCELO HORACIO MAQUIEIRA

Amsterdam, 27 April 2012.

OFICINA GABARDINE - Consultant.

(*) Designers were mentioned in the same correlative order they were scheduled for last Seoul Fashion Week A/W12.