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## Uncontrollable Color: Street Art Meets Street Style

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A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at  
Syracuse University

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and Renée Crown University Honors  
Spring 2017

Honors Capstone Project in Fashion Design

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## **Abstract**

*Uncontrollable Color: Street Art Meets Street Style* is the title of my senior Capstone thesis project for the Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Fashion Design at Syracuse University. For this project, I designed a collection of six complete outfits that explore the theme of London street art. The thesis project will be presented in a public fashion show at Syracuse University at the end of April.

In this critical statement, I will explore a brief history of fashion design, fabric dyes, and street style. Chapter two explains the origins of my inspiration for the collection. The last portion of this essay is dedicated to an explanation of my design process and a discussion of how I created my collection.

## Executive Summary

My capstone project is a six-look fashion collection that combines the idea of street art with street style and is titled *Uncontrollable Color: Street Art Meets Street Style*. Inspiration for the collection first hit while I was studying abroad in London in spring 2016. London is a city that often embraces street art and sometimes even requests it. Certain streets are covered in beautiful works of art by some known and some unknown artists. Every work is different in style, color scheme, line work, theme, and motif. No two pieces are the same. Within days, the pieces will be painted over with a completely new work of art and reborn. This sense of the art constantly changing parallels street style. Street style is always changing with the fashion trends of the time. Street style is current fashion inspired by contemporary culture and urban trends. We live in a world where we constantly crave change while also fearing it simultaneously.

I wanted to create a collection that embraces these concepts. I dedicated several months strictly to research, conceptualization, and design before creation could begin. Steven Matsumoto, CEO of Stigmare, Inc. donated the fabric. He had a lot of excess recycled and knit fabrics that he was willing to provide to me. Each piece of the collection has works of art I designed, all different from the last. This represents the difference between street works and how quickly they can transform into something an entirely different form. By

combining these two concepts, the simple street style construction created a canvas for my own personal view on street art. Bjørn Van Poucke and Elise Luong wrote, “Visual art in the public space has one of the longest and most widespread backgrounds of all creative forms” (*Street Art/ Today*). My aim was to combine this creative form with fashion design to express the ephemeral beauty of street art. My pieces will be showcased in a fashion show on April 27.

The collection began as a series of about 30 sketches that I eventually reduced down to six. The art was sketched separately and continued to change during the creation process. In order to accomplish the street style affect, I used a Paashe airbrush machine. Designs needed to be lightly drawn out on the fabric beforehand. A special kind of tape called Gaffer was also necessary to get the lines as exact as possible and control the paint from bleeding. Another problem to overcome was the overspray from the applicator. In order to solve this issue, I needed to lay out paper towels to cover the excess fabric. I applied black velvet ribbon to several of the pieces. In most cases, the ribbon had to be gathered to create rounded edges and then hand sewn onto the garment itself. Even though I created samples of the artwork before beginning on final fabric, I could not control the paint fully. This is why I chose to title my collection “Uncontrollable Color.” I embraced this risk and learned to appreciate the imperfections in the designs.

I believe my project to be a success despite the fact that my outcome and my original designs have very significant differences. The uncontrollable parts were beautiful and crucial additions to the project concept. Street art is not always perfect or perceived as perfect. The fact that it is constantly changing shows that we have to embrace the beauty around us because it could be gone within seconds.

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## Chapter 1

### **Brief History of Fashion Design, Fabric Dyes, and Street Style**

Fashion, though sometimes written off as frivolous, in actuality, is a way for people to express their status, passions, interests, gender, cultures, and class. As fashion photographer Bill Cunningham said, "Fashion is the armor to survive the reality of everyday life." My capstone project is a collection of six fashion looks entitled *Uncontrollable Color: Street Art Meets Street Style*. With this capstone, my goal was to create a collection that embraced the splendor and uniqueness of street art with the ever-changing concept of street style.

#### Early History

The origin of a named fashion designer dates back to the 1850s. Charles Frederick Worth, an Englishman, is credited as being the world's first designer. He was known for designing and constructing collections of couture gowns that he sold to Parisian socialites and royalty (*Charles Frederick Worth*). Worth was the first to establish a fashion house and to dictate to customers what would suit them in terms of fashion. He was also the first to show sample garments to the customers before sewing the made-to-measure garments rather than presenting the finished garments to the customers. Beginning with Worth's fashion house, Paris soon became the center of fashion design. Within a few years,

fashion garments began to be mass-produced and customers began to have more readily available clothing options ([Www.fibre2fashion.com](http://www.fibre2fashion.com)).

Women's magazines emerged in England in the 1870s which helped fashion design quickly spread to other countries all over the world. With new advances in technology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, fashion soon became a form of self-expression and cultural inclusion. Over the years, war, technology, celebrities, economy, religion, and art have all had an influence on fashion trends and innovations. Because fashion is an entity that is constantly growing and changing, street style was born. Street style is current fashion inspired by contemporary culture and urban trends seen on people walking city streets. It has always existed, though street style really became recognized in the 1960s. It blew up when [men.style.com](http://men.style.com) first posted Scott Schuman's images of attendees at Milan's Spring 2007 men's collections. "The New York Times had been publishing Bill Cunningham's street photography for decades, but in 2006 Scott Schuman and co. represented a new breed of street photographer, using the fledging online blog format as a platform for their work. (Phelps, [Vogue.com](http://Vogue.com))" Not long after, the streets of major cities were crawling with photographers eager to capture images of fashion's latest trendsetters. Fashion used to rely on traditional media such as newspapers and magazines alone, but blogging allowed for a wider audience to be reached almost instantaneously. People no longer had to wait for the high up fashion industry to

say what's "in," but rather anyone could post online about trends and what people were wearing. Today millions of people blog about an endless list of topics from fashion to food to fitness (Miller).

### Fabric Dyeing

The first mention of fabric dyeing was in 2600 BC and the dyes were originally made with "natural pigments mixed with water and oil used to decorate skin, jewelry, and clothing. These were the same dyes that were used for painting prehistoric caves, which emerged in places like El Castillo, Spain about 40,000 years ago" (Donatelli, 8). The dye colors came from plants, insects, and sea life. The colors sometimes became symbolic to certain cultures and status. Interestingly enough, "today, 90 percent of clothing is dyed synthetically, and critics say you can tell the next season's hit hue by the color of the rivers in China. Tragically, chemical dyeing can cause significant environmental degradation and harm to workers if not handled properly. Increasing interest in sustainable fashion has reawakened the art of *natural dyeing*" (8). Lots of research and self-practice in terms of dyeing was necessary for my project. When it comes to dyeing fabrics it is usually a hit or miss. The color is hard to control and it is very difficult to find a color that will come out exactly as seen on the package. The dyes I bought turned out to be nothing like the advertised color. The

yellow was brown, the pink was magenta, and the purple was not even attempted. Luckily, I used samples before using the actual tops. I had to use an alternative and ended up soaking the tops in the airbrush paint.

All of these aspects were important to bring my concept of street art meeting street style to life. Street art is about expression and bringing a blank space to life; it is not about recognition in the traditional realm of gallery work or created for money or fame. Street artists rarely use their real names to sign their work and seldom get recognized. They do it simply because they are passionate about the art itself. Each artist has his or her own style and process, whether that is freehand, stencil, prints, murals, or graffiti. The street is a place for them to share their work, passion, thought, and talent with the world without having to reveal their true identity. Martyn Reed, in *Street Art / Today*, said, "Creativity, born from a lack of attention or as an escape from oppressive reality, will always find an outlet" (Luong 4). Some of the earliest forms began in the 1920s and 1930s when gangs would paint graffiti on exterior building walls and the sides of train cars. Street art really became popular, however, during the graffiti art boom of the early 1980s when young people were responding to their socio-political environment. Fashion trend expert Tom Julian wrote, "Street art today has come into its own. It's not about graffiti or rebellion, but creative expression." (Luong, 4) My capstone project unites street art with street style to create a clothing collection.

## Chapter 2

### Inspiration

I first gravitated to street art while spending the spring semester 2016 in London, England. London's streets are filled with intricate, compelling works of art that cover the walls. I have studied fashion design for over seven years, however, during this experience abroad, I encountered my first overwhelming moment of inspiration as a designer. The London College of Fashion, which I was attending, incorporated tours around the city into our lessons and made an effort to teach us about the street art in certain areas.

It was a Tuesday and I was scheduled to meet with my Fashion History and Artifact class in Camden. When we arrived, the tutor walked us around the market and told us about the legal street art that covered the walls. I immediately fell in love with the bright colors and the varied line work that made up the pieces. In that moment, I knew this would be the inspiration for my capstone project. A few weeks later, my British Cultural Studies class met at the Leake Street Tunnel (Figure 6) which is located in Lambeth. The tunnel is reserved for graffiti artists to hone and display their skills. This strengthened my love for the craft even further and solidified my idea for the capstone project. I began documenting my favorite pieces of street art and continued for the rest of my abroad experience as well as

the following summer in New York City during my summer internship with Vera Wang.

The art on the walls and buildings was constantly changing. Every time I would visit a location the art would be painted over and made into something new. At first this saddened me because it meant that the art had been removed, but after some thought, I realized that it only made the pieces even more beautiful. The fact that they were there for a short period of time means that the viewer really had to absorb the artwork. Then the space is reborn with a new lively piece. The same is with street style. Street style is influenced by the current trends which, within this generation, are changing within days at a time.

I began to connect this to the world we live in and my life in particular. We live in a world where things are constantly changing, and if we don't take the time to stop and appreciate the present, we will miss out on so much beauty. Moments pass, but what matters is how you react to them and carry them with you. With this project, I sought to break the barrier between art and design. Typically, the two are thought of as completely separate entities so I wanted to produce a collection that incorporated both.

## Chapter 3

### Project

My capstone project is a six-look spring/summer fashion collection that combines the theme of street art with the concept of street style. Just like the street art, street style is constantly changing with the trends and influences of the world. By combining these two concepts, the simple street style construction created a canvas for my own personal view on street art. Bjørn Van Poucke and Elise Luong wrote, “Visual art in the public space has one of the longest and most widespread backgrounds of all creative forms” (Luong, 8). My aim was to combine this creative form with fashion design to express the ephemeral beauty of street art. My pieces will be showcased in a fashion show on April 27. University women of all backgrounds, races, and religions will model my pieces in Goldstein Auditorium. Having diverse models was important to me because one of my goals as a designer is to promote equality in the fashion world. I want my collection to be for everyone and not just a specific group. When those models walk down the runway I want the young women in the audience to be able to picture themselves wearing my garments.

This project is different than anything done before. Many designers, such as Marc Jacobs, Louis Vuitton, and Levi’s, have collaborated with street artists to create collections inspired by their work; however, no designer has designed both

the art and the clothing. Also, most of the designers had the art printed onto the fabric before making the clothing, whereas I have airbrushed directly onto the finished garments. Each garment I have produced cannot be exactly replicated, making it one of a kind.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Process**

I began my research for this capstone a year ago during my semester in London. While there, I gathered photos of street art pieces that inspired me (seen below in Figures 1 through 8). I identified with the colors used and the line work that came together to form pure emotion and life across the streets of the city. When I returned to America, I went through all of the photos and selected my favorites. I created a sketchbook filled with these images and began my sketches for the collection. After about 30 sketches (seen below in Figures 9), I began to edit the designs I thought looked best and worked cohesively. I then scanned my sketches and began to work on them digitally. I prefer to work on my sketches digitally because it allows me to manipulate them and clean up the line work. I eventually chose the six looks that would make up my collection (seen below in Figure 10). My goal was to create a collection that embodied the feeling of street style through the garments' construction and street art as the surface design. Both

street style and street art are constantly changing. This endless change is what emphasizes the true beauty and art behind the pieces.

I planned to create the garments and then use a combination of hand printing and airbrush to create the designs; I later decided to only use the airbrush application with the addition of a velvet ribbon appliqué. I borrowed a Paasche airbrush applicator and a compressor from a professor and learned the basics from him. I then researched online to master the settings while using the applicator. It comes with several parts that constantly need to be washed out and then reassembled. The next step was finding my models through our class model call and then taking their measurements. My fabrics are a combination of recycled materials and knits that were donated from Steven Paul Matsumoto the CEO of Stigmare, Inc. Recycling fabrics has become very important with the recent earth conscious movements. The fact that the trends and styles are constantly changing doesn't have a very positive effect on the planet, which makes recycling so important. "Fashion is the second most polluting industry in the world after oil. From raw material extraction to the production of textile fibres, the industry's upstream processes rely heavily on our world's finite resources including land, water, and energy. Once designs are brought to life, the impact of the fast-fashion model of production and consumption is apparent in the growing volume of low-quality apparel that quickly becomes textile waste, for which there are limited

positive end-of-life solutions” (Circle Textiles Program). This issue needs to begin to be recognized on a larger scale.

Several samples were made in muslin before cutting into the final fabrics. With each garment, the airbrushing improved. Even though I did samples of the artwork before beginning on final fabric, the paint cannot fully be controlled. This is why I chose to title my collection “Uncontrollable Color.” I embraced this risk and learned to appreciate the imperfections in the designs. These imperfections helped me to realize that it was more accurate to paint the pieces flat before being sewn together.

In order to create the sharp lines and shapes, I used Gaffer tape to block off the chosen areas. I then used paper towels to block off the excess spray. It was more efficient working with one color at a time rather than to repeatedly wash out the airbrush between each shape. Each garment piece took several hours to paint and then needed to be sewn together. Certain garments in Looks Two, Three, Five, and Six include a  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch black velvet ribbon either as straps or as a design aspect.

Look One was very exact. (Figure 11) This look took lots of focus, tape, paper towels, and time to complete. The triangles had to be drawn out beforehand and then color-coded with pins as to not place similar colors next to one another. Then the tape was used to section off each triangle, one at a time. Paper towels were laid out to protect from overspray. Each color was done completely at

a time before moving onto the next. The entire painting process for this garment took twenty-one hours to complete.

Look Two was more random. (Figure 12) A pouring technique was used to create the drippy effect and then white paint was splattered on the top to break up the color. This look was extremely uncontrollable and the end result was a big surprise due to the fact that the colors bled immensely. The original design and sample had much finer drip lines than the final piece.

In Look Three, (Figure 13) the ribbon needed to be gathered where rounded and then hand sewn onto the exterior of the vest after the airbrush design was finished. This process took several days to complete. The top needed to be dyed with a specific dye type for the fiber. An issue that occurred, however, is that the dye did not turn out the correct color. In order to solve this issue, I had to submerge the top into a pan filled with the airbrush paint to get the color exact.

Look Four was originally supposed to be yellow but then was left untouched when pairing it with the colorful skirt. The skirt needed lots of tape to get the exact straight edges. The lines had to be drawn out beforehand and then the stripes were then color coded to prep for the airbrushing. (Figure 14)

Look Five took more of a random approach, similar to look one, with the trousers. I went into this look not knowing what the design would be. I began experimenting with eyedroppers filled with the airbrush paint and soon became

fond of the diamond shape that resulted from the drop bleeding out. Tape was then used to create a negative affect when painted over. Finally, the black velvet strip was sewn through the crossover of the X's. The top was then done the same way as the top in look three. (Figure 15)

Finally, Look Six used the velvet ribbon as straps and tape was used to help with the straight edges of the stripes. Again, the stripes had to be measured and drawn out prior to the airbrushing. The black color was hard to achieve because it dried lighter than hoped for. (Figure 16)

Each look took careful planning and lots of sampling before the process could be started on the final fabric. The process required great concentration. The biggest challenges were bleeds and overspray.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

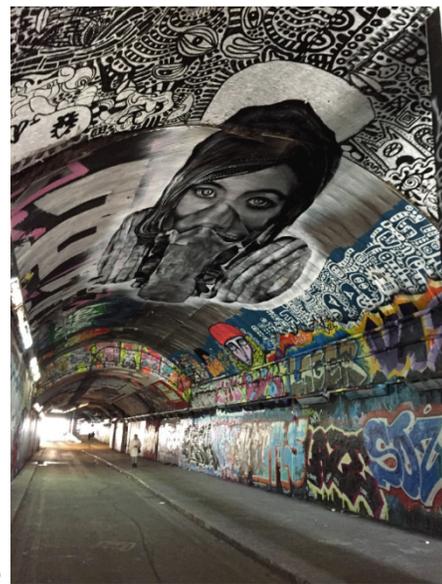


Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16



## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

I believe my project to be a success despite the fact that my outcome and my original designs have very significant differences. Overcoming the challenges of trying to control the paint was difficult but I found the uncontrollable parts to be beautiful additions to the project concept as a whole. Street art is not always perfect or perceived as perfect. Every artist has his or her own style. Some artists are more exact, some are more abstract, some control their paint, and others let it bleed. Learning the ins and outs of using the airbrush machine and perfecting the craft were very exciting. I came out with a greater respect and appreciation for the street artists than ever before and I hope to eventually be able to return to London to study them further.

Many of the garments took a lot more time than I originally planned for, however, the extra time allowed me to get the pieces to where I wanted them to be. Several hours of labor and concentration were necessary for each piece. The collection as a whole took about twenty-six weeks to complete. I wanted to break a barrier between art and design and explore how the two could complement each other. This collection shows that the entire process of surface design, garment design, and construction can all be done by one individual. Most designers who have dabbled with the concept of street art have commissioned an artist to do the

surface designs for them and then have those designs printed onto the fabric used to make the garments. This process helped me to develop as a designer and gain more skills that will be helpful in the professional world. I am grateful to have had this experience and look forward to presenting it to an audience at the senior fashion show on April 27<sup>th</sup>.

Look One



Look Two



Look Three



Look Four



Look Five



Look Six



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