

Grey Cincinnati: A Site-specific Fashion Collection

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In 2012, in collaboration with local institutions and participants, I executed a site-specific fashion collection shaped by the history, culture, geography, and people of Cincinnati, Ohio. 'Grey Cincinnati' addressed racial segregation, a timely issue as the city's current urban renewal re-opens a discussion about race and social equality. This site-specific fashion collection sought to bring together the segregated African-American and Caucasian communities, transforming Cincinnati into an arena for cultural discourse (Kwon 26).

The premise a site-specific collections is to meld fashion design and site-specific public art to capture a location's physical, social and historical complexities (Kwon 3). As a fashion scholar trained in fine arts, I have fused both disciplines to devise a new creative research framework 'Social Practice Art', utilizing arts-based research's capacity to raise social awareness and fashion's egalitarian character (Leavy 13).

'Grey Cincinnati' brought together a multiracial group of young Cincinnatians to imagine an integrated future. With grants from the Puffin Foundation and Ryerson University (and support from two local galleries), I spent one month in Cincinnati executing the project.





All garments were solved in tones of grey, in reference to the mix of Cincinnati's predominant ethnic groups, black and white. The lines and volumes were informed by census maps (showing racial segregation in the city) as well as by iconic Cincinnati architecture. All materials were sourced from the oldest locally-owned fabric store.

Simultaneous to garment construction and the fashion show production, I trained real people models in walking and posing on a runway. The project offered its participants, who may otherwise not have crossed paths, a dynamic shared experience (Arcade 30).

The fashion show premiered at a gallery in Northside, an integrated neighborhood of low-income African-Americans and professional Caucasians. As the models walked the runway to a local music soundtrack, the futuristic collection showcased a vision of a future harnessing the energy of Cincinnati's full ethnic spectrum. The show received local and international press coverage and the virtual community built around the project's Facebook page continues to exist and grow.

Last April, 'Grey Cincinnati' was shown at Fashion Arts Toronto, providing more community-building, press coverage, and the reaction of a multiracial metropolis to a project addressing racial segregation.

Arcade: Artists and Place-Making. London: Black Dog, 2006. Print.

Kwon, Miwon. *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity.* Massachusetts: MIT, 2004. Print.

Leavy, Patricia. *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice.* New York: The Guilford, 2009. Print.