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ROOFLESS



Founder of ROOFLESS clothing, Bethany Williams, lived and studied in the Isle of Man prior to progressing to higher education at The University of Brighton.

ROOFLESS IS AN ART PRACTICE AND FASHION COLLECTION WITH A CHARITABLE MESSAGE. IT WANTS NOT JUST TO COMMENT ON A COMMUNITY, BUT TO WORK IN THEIR SOCIAL SPACES TO TRY TO CREATE A CHANGE BY FURTHERING ECONOMIC GAIN FOR CHARITY.

By using their social capital, intellectual and labour intense skills they aim to

create a profit, which is then given to connected charities, continuing the cycle. Jennifer Parkes spoke with Bethany to find out more about her most recent project and how this original, inspirational idea began.

So, before you went to university, you studied the Art Foundation Course at the Isle of Man College. Did your time there influence you, or change the way you looked at art and design?

Definitely! I didn't really know what I wanted to do, I was really interested in Geography and sustainable development, but I was also really interested in art and fashion, so I did the Art Foundation to help me make a decision. It really helped me to understand that I wanted to progress and do art as a degree. I really wasn't interested in the system of fashion but I enjoyed making garments, so that led onto choosing my degree, a course that focused on conceptual and contemporary art.

You began your project Roofless whilst you were studying at University. What was it that inspired you to begin this project?

I filmed a documentary for a charity called Impact, which is a charity that helps people that have come out of rehab or prison to find employment. Meeting people that had gone through that, their experience and how much the charity had helped made me think that I wanted to do the same thing through my art practice. I also read a lot of art theory on how art can have a social effect and make a social change, which really affects my work too.

Was the idea always based in reworking clothes or did that evolve from another idea?

The initial plan came to me while I was volunteering at a soup kitchen in Brighton, it was always about trying to produce an effect for that community and I've always had a connection with garments, which I thought could be a good fit. Because I had been working at Garage [magazine], which was part of such a high end industry, in comparison to the soup kitchen, there seemed such juxtaposition between the two. I wanted to make a brand that could bridge the two environments, bringing the topic of charity and impoverishment into the fashion industry.

With the clothes created for Roofless, you included tags that told the story of the individual who had previously owned the item. Were there any stories that particularly struck you?

It was really interesting; when you're working with the people there it's crazy to see the desperate situations that some people are forced into. Everybody was so lovely, and from all walks of life, it was really rewarding.

[COLLECTION 1]



How did you come up with your idea for the Wood Street reinvention project, which saw you start A New Life?

Back when I was collaborating with Public Works, I was hired as a designer for them because they were given a charity shop called 'A New Life' on Wood Street, after the Arts Council gave 24 different artists a shop on Wood Street to reinvent. Public Works were given that shop, so they built an art residency in the window space and then I use the clothing from within the shop to make the garments.

Were the influences behind the work similar to your first collection, such as people's personal stories?

The influence for this project was the Wood Street community rather than individual people. For the first collection, I used items from individual people and they were the influence behind the design, whereas this collection is inspired by Wood Street. I did a lot of research in the library about the history of the community, and found inspiration in conversations I had with people in the shop.

Do you have a particular item that you put together that you are most proud of from either collection?

My favourite would be the dinosaur jumper, it was interesting to make and it was really fun. It was difficult, I had to vacuum seal the dinosaurs in by myself with a heat gun, standing there with a cloth over my mouth, as I couldn't find any company who could do it!



Where does your inspiration come from when it comes to the design or customisation of the garments? For example, little touches such as wooden collars or shrink-wrapped dinosaurs – do these have stories of their own?

The first collection was inspired by shelter and protection, everything that a homeless person would need. The design was all based around insulation and shelter, so everything that was used to reinvent the items was from hardware stores. It was an interesting juxtaposition, as then we would be selling the garments to people who wouldn't really need these items, while there would continue to be homeless people that did need them. The second collection was designed around Wood Street – the history, the community, the conversations. There was a man who had a horse collection; he collected literally everything to do with horses! He would buy all these objects, and the stories and the horses are featured in the prints. Children would also come and buy dinosaur toys with their pocket money, which we put into jumpers. Every element of our engagement with Wood Street has gone into the design.

Your practice has been well-received in the UK, is there any part of its reception that has been particularly exciting for you?

Garage have always been great, they've been amazing and have always helped us with getting to where we are now. We're collaborating with Pop [magazine] at

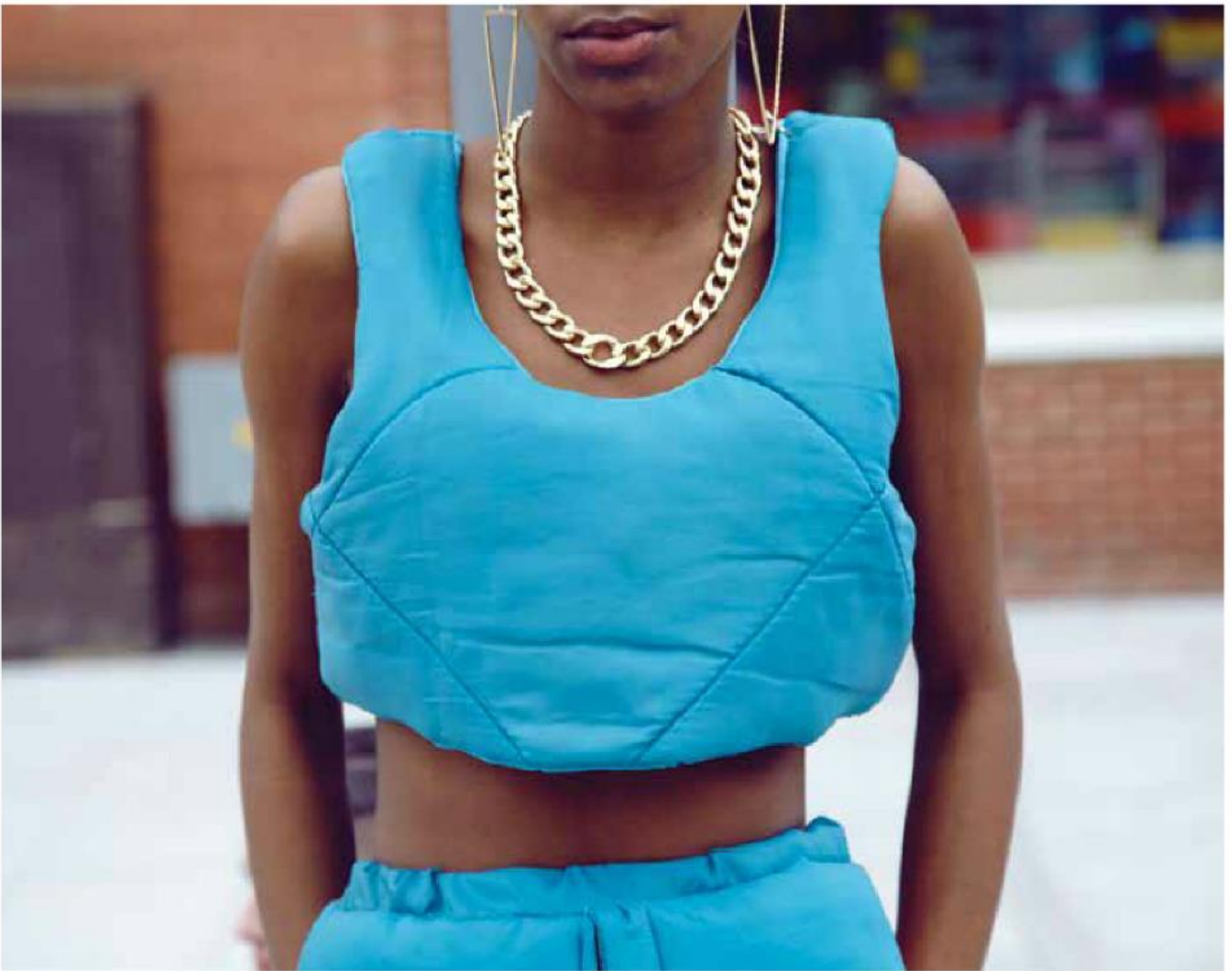


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THE SECOND COLLECTION WAS DESIGNED
AROUND WOOD STREET - THE HISTORY, THE
COMMUNITY, THE CONVERSATIONS.

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the moment to photograph some of the garments, which is really exciting as I've always been a big fan of theirs. We've had a lot of coverage in the press recently with the help of our press agency, 360 + One Quarter, they've been amazing in helping us to be featured in Italian Vogue recently.

Is there another project in the pipeline that you can share with us?

We're hoping to do a project with the mobile library in London, which loans books to homeless people as, obviously, you can't loan books from a normal library without a fixed address. We'd love to collaborate with them and also with Space, which is both an art studio and homeless shelter.

What is your ultimate goal with this project? What would you ultimately like to achieve?

Ultimately, it has to be a charity, so that is the main goal. We want to build a charity of our own rather than working with others, so that we can be the end point of the money that we raise, but also with a fashion connection.



Do you have any advice for students currently in secondary school or at the Isle of Man College that are thinking of pursuing art or design as a career?

I would say never feel pressured to be bracketed within one speciality, always be engaging with whatever YOU want to be engaged with. You don't have to be specifically a fashion designer, or a photographer, or an artist, you can be whatever you want to be; it's the bridge between fields which is where the most exciting stuff is coming from. And always be self-productive! Always be trying to get internships or doing your own projects because, ultimately, it's yourself that you want to be working for at the end of the day.