IT WAS, IT IS, WHAT IF

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by
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It was, it is, what if is inspired by the current political and economic situation in Venezuela, I decided to create a series of dresses that evoke memories and the state of deterioration of life in my home country.

From the beautiful, colorful Venezuela of the past, to the present state of escalating violence and corruption that has led to devastating outcomes for the rights and freedoms of the majority of the population.

This collection reflects the love, frustration and sadness I fell when I think about Venezuela and my wish to bring awareness to the situation by wearing the garments. Each dress serves as a metaphor for the stages that my country has experience: symbolizing a specific period of time; my happy childhood, the demise of the pleasant conditions, the disastrous present, and hope for a better future.
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INTRODUCTION

Inspired by the current political and economic situation in Venezuela, and by the changes I have seen as I was growing up there, I decided to create a series of dresses that evoke memories and the current state of deterioration in the quality of life in my home country. The collection expresses the love and sadness I feel when I think about Venezuela and by wearing them I wish to bring awareness to the situation.

When I look back at the life I had compared with the life many Venezuelans have now, I recognize a strong contrast. In the past, People were not afraid of walking in the streets. As a child, I was allowed to go out during the day, and night, without worrying about my safety. I remember there were all kind of foods and goods, and that my parents were not worried about the lack of basic necessities. Life was much simpler, happier, now all of it is just a memory. As many Venezuelans say “They are not living, they are surviving”

The things I love most about my country have slowly vanished. I love how happy my childhood was, and now that experience has been taken away from the majority of the kids. Instead of playing with friends, now they have to stand in line for hours with their parents to be able to buy food. Venezuela is known for its beautiful landscapes, and various climates, and was once a popular tourist destination. Now it is almost impossible to travel there due to the high rate of inflation and lack of safety. The country has a rich gastronomy that varies from region to region, but, currently most individuals are not able to afford food. We were once voted the happiest country in the world and now there is so much hate, and resentment. What is happening now is not just an economic crisis but also a humanitarian one. The situation and atmosphere there have
progressively changed, and each of the four dresses that I designed and constructed, is meant to tell a story and display a stage of this transition. (Figure 1)

DISCUSSION

The dresses are divided in two sets: the screen printed dresses, and the woven dresses. (Reference figure 2, and 3). The basic silhouette used in all four garments is a shift dress, which is a simple, straight shape without a waistline. The screen printed dresses are sewn in sections composed of different patterns and imagery (figure 4). There are seven sections or panels in each garment; referencing the seven stars on the old Venezuelan flag. The use of these sections also reference an iconic artwork called “Las Nubes de Calder” which is displayed in The Aula Magna; the most important auditorium in Venezuela (reference figure 5). “Las Nubes” which translates to the clouds; is made of pieces of wood suspended from the ceiling of this auditorium in various sized planes of curvilinear shape. This sculpture was designed by a North American artist called Alexander Calder. It represents a time when many international companies and artists were welcome to create work in Venezuela.

The two dresses in the screen printed set are composed of motifs of innocent and playful imagery like parrots and various plants. The hand screen printing technique was used to create simple shapes that reveal inconsistencies of touch. The colors appear to vary in value almost like a watercolor, which effectively communicates the blurriness of my memories of childhood. (See figure 6) These prints showcase images a child remembers, and the quality of the mark making brings nostalgia from the past into play. The dresses in this set, Garment A, My Happy Childhood (figure 2a), and garment C the Disastrous Present (figure 2b) are constructed from sheer lightweight
silk, and include a diagonal hemline. These features accentuate the playful aspect of childhood and the inconsistent nature of memory.

Although these dresses picture the same motifs, the dramatic contrast of color is used to create meaning, representing different moods and stages of mind. The warmer colors, primarily pinks, yellows, oranges, represent the happier times, of my childhood. They also reference optimism and hope. The cool neutral palette of the other dress symbolize the impossibility of that playful experience for children today.

Each dress is embellished with embroidery which reflects the richness and hope there was and is still left. The stitching includes metallic silver and gold thread of different weights. The unexpected appearance of metallic line highlights a positive aspect, particularly with the heavier thread used for the motifs that I stitched by hand on both dresses (reference figure 7). The lighter weight thread is used for the machine stitching that appears only on dress A (figure 8). The more subtle embroidery lines create an additional layer of interest and help to unify the contrasting motifs.

In the second set of dresses I integrate digitally printed fabric with the process of weaving on the floor loom. The prints feature more photographic images like national symbols, iconic places, and unpleasant imagery such as protests, and military weapons. By using the vivid effect of a digital print I can showcase what I consider the most relevant reasons of the deterioration, and what the country could become with the absence of these problems. (To see the photos reference figure 9) Again, these dresses are opposite in concept. The first dress in the set, Garment B or the demise of pleasant conditions (figure 3a), displays the contrast between my memories of the past with the realities that damaged Venezuela. Photographs of images derived from military
power, protests, land invasions, are combined digitally before printing. The images on
the other dress Garment D or the hope for a better future (figure 3b) are uplifting, the
national flower, and tree, landscapes, the Venezuelan flag, and also text taken from the
song called Venezuela.

This song talks about the beauty of the country, and brings nostalgia to the
listener. The phrases used in the garments state the following: “Llevo tu luz y tu aroma
en mi piel” which translates to “I carry your light and scent in my skin”, “entre tus playas
quedo mi ninez, tendida al viento y al sol” translating to “my childhood stayed among
your beaches, lying to the wind and the sun”, and lastly “Soy desierto, selva, nieve y
volcan” which means “I am dessert, jungle, snow, and volcano” a phrase that indicates
the richness of the country. (To see details of the song see figure 10a-10c). In my
opinion this song; written by Luis Silva, brings the hope that the cherished county of my
birth will return to its former state of beauty and peace.

The digital prints of photographic images and text are collaged on the computer
screen according to how I want the design on the dress (reference figure 11). Motifs are
relatively easy to read when they are seen as a flat fabric. But the cloth must be cut into
strips to be used in the weaving. Reassembling them on the loom causes the
information to become more complex. (For details of the weaving process reference
figure 12). This emphasizes the idea that everything is more complicated than it seems,
that nothing is perfect, that an event is a compilation of many factors. I use a twill
structure to connect the strips of fabric systematically in the process of weaving on the
floor loom. This weave pattern creates a diagonal linear movement on the surface of the
cloth and adds dynamic interest (figure 13), when the thread on the loom passes over
the strips of photographic fabric there are instances where the threads blend with the background and disappear and there are others where they completely obscure the background. This technique helps me to physically and symbolically interlace experiences whether they are positive or negative. The warp is a natural color which resembles the color white that is associated with positivity, innocence, light, hope, and peace, it unites the weft strips of various colors selected for their emotional associations.

SUMMARY

Combining my knowledge of fashion with my interest in textiles seemed like a natural way for me to communicate my concerns about the current situation in Venezuela, and an effective manner to compare the past and present. The garments in this collection serve as a metaphor for the stages that my country has experience from my perspective. The visual elements of the designs are meant to evoke my happy memories as well as the reality of the present situation.

I believe that fashion should not be meaningless, and these garments provide a way for me to express my feelings and concerns in a form that is familiar to me. Garments provide a way to make my ideas more accessible to the public. The dresses are meant to be worn and seen in a variety of settings. When one of the dresses is worn in a location that correlates with the message of the piece, it will blend in and make the meaning very apparent. Alternatively, if the piece is worn out of context, I hope it will attract attention and provoke questions. Bringing the most visibility to my concerns is very important to me. Wearable art is uniquely portable, allowing me to combine my
interest in fashion, sewing, weaving, and printing on fabric, so my message can move easily out into the world.
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