

Informal Studio Visit: Anna Van Gheem's Ongoing Discovery

Maddie Murphy met with Anna Van Gheem — a 2017 BFA candidate in the Kansas City Art Institute's Fiber department to discuss her playful and larger-than-life collection from the 2016 [West 18th Street Fashion Show](#), Wild Summer, and her current thesis work.

First hearing about the annual Kansas City fashion event from a classmate, Anna Van Gheem remarked, "I thought, [the show] is outside of school, I can reach a larger audience. I recommend that anyone do it, it's such a huge platform. I sort of had to be a secretary for myself. It took so much time planning. I had never made enough items for a collection before. To make five really coherent looks was difficult at first. I probably changed my mind at least ten times for each look. Sitting in the [KCAI Fiber] gallery, staring at and playing with different combinations. I asked anyone and everyone walking by what they thought, and those outside perspectives helped."



Anna Van Gheem's Studio. Image courtesy of the artist.

Perusing her [Instagram](#) account, then glancing at Van Gheem's studio space amidst a pile of sparkly fabric swatches, she embodies an enchanting and refined sense of style. Her past work hangs neatly on a rack, while materials and more tests were found piled on her studio desk, overflowing the long-arm quilting machine. Mood boards and scraps of inspiration collaged the wall behind. Van Gheem's work is a more extreme version of her philosophy, a juxtaposition of silly and satirical but still seriously invested in and responding to current fashion.

"[Aesthetically] I have been always been inspired by [Valentino](#). Last year, [Marry Me Jimmy Paul](#). was huge for me, these super gaudy Dutch designers... this year it's more [Prada](#), [Miu Miu](#) specifically, because it is super quirky and girly."



Van Gheem design. Image courtesy Ryan Swartzlander

Her process of making is pretty unique. "I have to be working on twenty things at once with 'nests' everywhere so I can see it every day. A mood board is the most important thing in my practice. It's a subconscious thing, those colors and influences are burned into my brain and find their way into my work."

In terms of material choices Van Gheem gravitates towards the hardest; enjoying the challenge of

mastering vinyl and pleather. She believes the point of her undergraduate education is to foster experimentation, noting she doesn't take herself too seriously but is ready to build a business.

"Last semester pushed me to think about who my client was and to be more relatable. So much was in my head that was hard to express with words. It was a challenge to be more inclusive, and not just make my work a personal diary of my feelings."

I asked if she could change anything about her work, what would it be? She thought for a moment, and replied, "Craft is the biggest struggle. Patience is a huge thing that I struggle with, taking the time to do things, versus being impulsive."

When asked what advice she has for Kansas City artists interested in pursuing fashion, and she replied, "There are a lot of independent artists here interested in fashion, so Kansas City is unique in that way. Art is well supported in this community, so a lot of local fashion has a basis in fine art. That being said, don't be afraid to move on and expand your horizons, if you can be more successful somewhere else."

Van Gheem has begun working on her senior show, which is planned for April. She is planning sizes, focusing on equality and diversity of models, as well as meeting with collaborators, including photographers, graphic designers, accessory designers, and videographers. "I want to work with as many people as I can, make it a huge thing," She expressed excitedly, "I have my own little bubble, but there are people out there with bigger bubbles."