

FACTORS AFFECTING
THE AUSTRALIAN POSITION
IN INTERNATIONAL FASHION DESIGN

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Mieke Leppens

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For Aristotle, to understand a thing was to know its essence, or to define it. And definition was not of names, but of essences; concepts were “real”, their essences were identified with this reality, and the truth could be reached through precise definition. A true system of knowledge thus became essentially a classification scheme, or an ability to relegate things to explicitly delimited categories

(Ghiselin, 1969)

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A B B R E V I A T I O N S

CPI	<i>Code de la Propriété Intellectuelle</i> [= common intellectual property law]
CSCP	<i>La Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne</i>
DISR	Department of Industry, Science and Resources
DJ	David Jones department stores, Australia
FIA	Fashion Industries of Australia
GMC	Groupement Mode & Creation
IFM	<i>Institute Français de la Mode</i> , a school established by Bergé & Grumbach
TCF	Textile, Clothing and Footwear industries
TCFADA	TCF of Australia Development Authority
TCFC	Textile, Clothing and Footwear Council
TCFL	Textile, Clothing, Footwear and Leather Industries
TFIA	Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia

A B S T R A C T

Success in fashion design is important both in its own right and because it has positive influences on the culture of a country and because of the favourable ramifications it can have across many unrelated industries. This dissertation investigates the Australian fashion design industry and asks whether there is a place for a semi-autonomous industry regulator of the kind found in other countries.

France is a natural choice as a model because on the one hand it has the most success and enjoys the highest prestige in international fashion design, and on the other it has a well-developed support and accreditation structure, the *Fédération Française de la Couture, du Prêt-à-Porter des Couturiers et des Createurs de Mode*. The Federation oversees the whole process, promoting and protecting innovation in the industry and laying down the criteria used in fashion accreditation.

These observations led to the question, if a parallel fashion designers' organization were introduced in Australia, what are the chances it would be suitable and effective?

To answer this question, interviews were conducted in Australia and in three European countries. The major systematic enquiry was based on a sample of 48 local industry people in key positions in media, commerce and education, who were encouraged to describe and evaluate the industry and to supply answers to a systematic survey document. Candour was promoted by the anonymity of the survey process.

The major outcome in terms of evaluation of the industry was that for historical and structural reasons Australian fashion design is not characterized by a high volume of original work. Consequently it is not having much impact internationally and the upper echelons are not providing the basis for downward diffusion of ideas. If the standard (French) classification were applied to Australia, the bulk of the labels would be categorized at the lower end of the scale. The informants provided a strong consensus regarding the nature of the shortfalls including the undue emphasis given to derivative design, the lack of special support for young talent and the low priority given to the synergy between art and high quality craftsmanship. There was agreement that Australian fashion designers should not focus on product just for local consumers, because fashion in clothing is not central to the minds of the average Australian as it is for example in European countries. Fashion designers might be wise to exploit the position of Australia on the edge of the Asian subcontinent and the pool of potential design talent from other countries within the Australian population. By drawing from the new aesthetics emerging in Australia's pluralistic society, designers could

easily be at the cutting edge internationally. They might showcase their work at overseas venues, although not necessarily, in the first instance, in countries like France.

Although a full-scale federation-type organization might fail for want of a solid innovative industry upon which it might be based, a limited version of such a controlling body could well succeed. Its task would be to steer new directions in education which develops a pool of creative talent through master classes which focus on understanding original design, the importance of the manual aspect in design and the mechanisms of, and rewards stemming from diffusion. Sponsorship should be granted to endeavours by a collective of such talent to showcase designs abroad. Government funds should be redirected away from the promotion of a generic product to a fashion-designing paradigm emphasizing “designer handwriting” as the value-added aspect.

In addition to exploring these issues, this dissertation provides reflections on the nature of the design process and suggests ways in which fashion design and fashion design education might move to revitalize the industry.