

DISSECTING THE DIASPORIC IDENTITY IN SINGAPORE THROUGH DRESS

Practitioner exhibitors

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Gallery

Level 1 Atrium, Tūhura Otago Museum

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Abstract

The history of Singapore as an immigration hub in Southeast Asia has made it a key migration corridor, especially among the diaspora from Southeast Asia, South Asia and East Asia. Post-colonial Singapore is home to a microcosm of diasporic communities that have adapted and assimilated into Singaporean society. While diasporas tend to be grouped together in broadly held conceptions, they are not monolithic. Rather, they should be recognised for their distinct cultures and traditions expressed through various means such as dress. Dress, which includes modifications and supplements to one's body, is not only a medium for self-expression but also a response to one's socio-cultural environment.

Since new generations have been formed within or even across different diasporas, people have now come to embrace a multitude of identities despite sharing the same ancestry. This, coupled with globalisation, has lowered the borders and boundaries of cultures, which has led to traditions being shared, emulated and reinterpreted by a wider community. As Singapore's cultural identity continues to evolve, it is worthwhile to question how diasporic communities can meet the demands of globalism as well as the desire to preserve one's heritage through their self-expression. In doing so, it is possible that they can offer a new, more diverse vision of Singapore's fashion identity.

This project investigates and documents how Chinese, Indian, Southeast Asian and Eurasian diasporas in Singapore express and negotiate their overlapping identities through dress. Qualitative research and material culture studies conducted primarily with second- and third-generation diasporas and their dress objects provides a deeper understanding of diaspora perspectives and their relationship with indigenous cultures. It examines how these cultures

can be retained in Singapore and what influence this can have on the country and its people. Presented through an interactive digital experience, it is an accessible educational and collaborative resource for current and future generations that also contributes to postcolonial fashion discourse in Singapore and Southeast Asia.

Project available at: <https://www.irisrasa.com/>

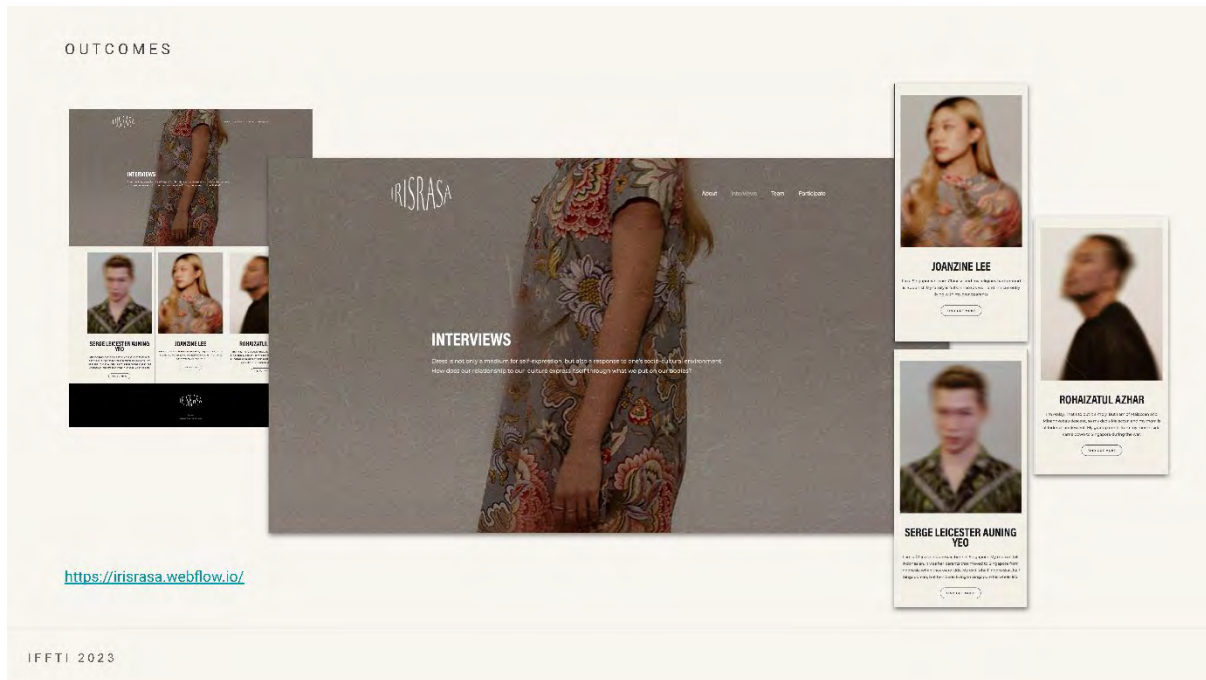


Image 1. Screen captures from IRISRASA website